THE HAWKEYE

HERBERT QUICK

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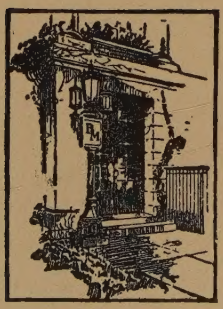

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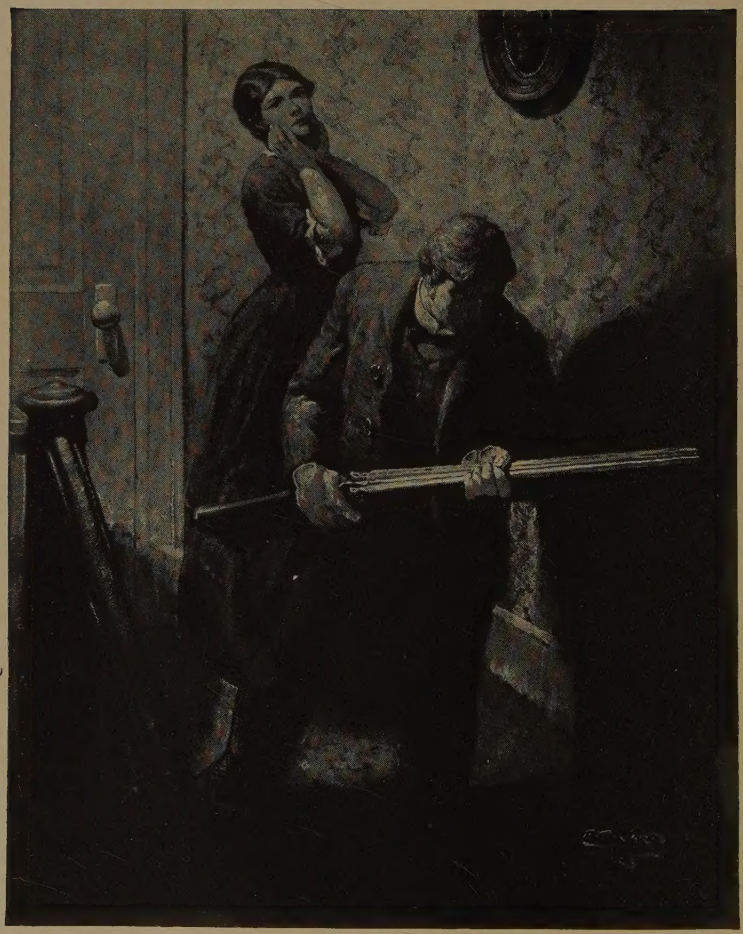

"Stay in your room, dear, and remember that the last words I said to you are that I love you."

THE HAWKEYE

By

HERBERT QUICK

With Illustrations
By
E. F. WARD

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THE HAWKEYE

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BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

COMING EVENTS CAST SHADOWS

THE hero of this history is Fremont McConkey. I wish I could tell you the name of the heroine; but for the life of me, I can not. I think it might puzzle Fremont himself to select her even now. One of the objects of this investigation is to identify her.

Fremont was born on the first fair day after the first full moon in June, 1857, in a house which might be called a hovel, situated on the Northwest Quarter of Section Twenty-two in what was then Buchanan Township, named for the president, but now in Willow Township, Monterey County, Iowa. I say it might be called a hovel, and it would be safe to call it such now in the late 'nineties, but then it so nearly equaled in quality what the quality lived in, that it was really a residence. It was called the residence of Alvin McConkey, Fremont's father, in the vital statistics of Dick McGill's paper, the *Monterey Centre Journal,* in the issue of June 24th, 1857, and the statement was added, "Mother and

child are doing well"; but I deem it proper to say that while the poor mother lay in bed with little Fremont by her side, she could look out through a hole in the roof and see the great prairie stars serenely burning their golden lamps in the sky, while she heard the yelping of the hungry wolves outside. She did not share the optimism of Mr. McGill as to the child and the mother doing well, however. Owing to certain facts known best to Mrs. Absalom Frost, who presided over the confinement, she was far from comfortable; and though an ignorant wife of an ignorant pioneer, she had some doubts as to whether the little red object by her side was likely to "do well." Whoever was responsible for bringing a child into the world in Iowa in 1857 may be pardoned for such doubts.

Fremont McConkey is a genius. Almost any of the old settlers will agree to this, taking leave only to add certain qualifying words, such as "odd" or "queer" or "great" with an emphasis of the speaker's own. Anyhow, he is different. Perhaps he was never more exactly comparable to other people of his age than he was on the day of his birth.

There was a good deal of discussion immediately after his birth as to what sort of man he would be. Mrs. Frost noted the time by the sun, and bemoaned the fact that the McConkey clock had stopped weeks before. Doctor Bliven got there too late to meet the crisis. All he could do was to congratulate Mrs. Frost on having solved a problem which would have stumped most midwives; but she interrupted him by asking the time, and when he told her she began certain complicated calculations as to just what was the hour when Fremont arrived. She explained that she wanted to know where the Sign was when the child was born. She knew, though Doctor Bliven smiled sarcastically at the notion, that unless the Sign was right, the outlook was dark. As there was no almanac in the house at that time, she told Mrs. McConkey that she would look at hers

when she got home, and would tell the anxious mother the next time she saw her whether the Sign was in the heart, the reins, the thighs, or elsewhere at the moment of Fremont's birth. But she never disclosed the revelations of her mystic science. To the neighbor women she was not so reticent, but justified her failure to tell Mrs. McConkey by saying that sometimes what a body don't know don't hurt 'em. And then she shook her head dismally.

As for Fremont himself, he never believed in signs after he reached the years of opinion, and accounted for himself and his individuality by asserting that he was made or marred—it was long hard to tell which—by events that took place before he was born—but not long before. These were the events:

The hard times which oppressed the people at this time, especially the McConkey family. They had driven into the country the summer of 1856, intending to go on to the Fort Dodge Country, where Major William Williams was founding a community; but owing to mud and high water and the deadly weariness of travel, they had stopped and bought their hundred and twenty acres in Section Twenty-two. Times were not what they had been when they started. The great panic of 1857 was closing in on the nation. There was little work to be had, and little grown in the way of food. So in the winter of 1857 something happened to the McConkey family that was never spoken of afterward except in lowered tones and with tragic mein—they had no flour, nothing of which to make bread, and no money with which to buy. Therefore Mrs. McConkey—and this was after Fremont, in his mother's language "was spoke for"—did this awful thing: she sifted the bran which was feed for the cows, and out of it got enough of the germs and kernels of the wheat to make what they called "bran bread." On this the McConkey family kept soul and body together. When I told Mrs. McConkey the other day that this was far bet-

ter food than that for which I now pay twice the price of white flour, she looked at me very reproachfully, and I changed the subject. This period when she was obliged to subsist on bran bread had given her something in the way of distinction; and like a cruel iconoclast, I was robbing her of it. So it was, that Fremont may have been made or marred by bran bread.

The second thing, was the dreadful winter of 1856-7. Fremont's mother's uncle, Uncle Steve Lawless, and his wife, Aunt Zuby, had started for the Fort Dodge Country in their covered wagon just before winter set in, and Mrs. McConkey was troubled about them. And in March, when winter was almost over, her husband, with a load he was bringing from the timber, was lost for the night on the prairie. She suffered intensely. She saw herself a widow, alone, at times, on the awful prairie, with no wood, no food, with her two little children, and maybe another, and no relatives this side of Columbiana County, Ohio. Mrs. McConkey always said that everything went dark before her eyes when he finally came into the door, with his load of wood and a barrel of flour. Fremont sometimes blamed the weather for things in his make-up.

The third thing, and he and his mother agreed that this was probably the thing, was the Spirit Lake Massacre. The reader will remember, but if he doesn't I will remind him, that in March of this year the settlers about Spirit Lake were nearly all cruelly massacred by the Indians of an outlaw band, in revenge for certain outrages which had been perpetrated upon them by an outlaw white man. Now when the news of this massacre reached the settlers to the east and south of its scene, the pioneers were struck with panic. They watched from the hilltops all over the state for the oncoming hosts of savages. They gathered in their villages and built forts. It was a reign of terror. And Mrs. Mc-

Conkey had more than her share of grief and anxiety, which in her delicate condition was scarcely fair; for in April she got a letter from Aunt Zuby Lawless telling her that they had got through to Webster City safe, that the Indians had not massacred her as yet; but that she was a deserted and undone woman because Uncle Steve, like a darned fool at his age, had gone with a party under Major Williams to fight the Indians. This was the celebrated Spirit Lake Expedition of 1857. Mrs. McConkey loved her Uncle Steve very dearly, and this was the last straw which may possibly have broken the camel's back. Mrs. Frost always said that a mark on the back of Fremont, right between his shoulder-blades, was a tomahawk etched there by the fright and excitement when the prairie burned over in April, and every one thought the Indians had fired the grass, and would follow the flames into the settlements. Fremont naturally never saw his birthmark even when in swimming; but from such accounts as he was able to get, he said it seemed to look quite as much like a scalp-lock, or a piece of bran bread as a tomahawk. But the old women were all against him.

So he may have been a victim of the Spirit Lake Massacre, though he was not born for several months after it was perpetrated. Two traits in his disposition appear as if they might have been the result of these events. One day, Mrs. Frost and another neighbor were at the McConkey "residence," and in discussing the horrors of the massacre, Mrs. Frost, speaking of the guilty Inkpadutah band of Indians, said: "Well, just so they don't come here, I don't care what they do." Whereat Fremont's mother flew into a passion of rage and tears at Mrs. Frost for her cruelty and selfishness.

Fremont was always subject to violent fits of anger, during which he quite lost control of himself. The connection with Mrs. McConkey's attack on Mrs. Frost is clear, as

many people do not need to be told. Then, Mrs. McConkey was very low in her spirits all that winter and spring, and especially after the news came from Aunt Zuby. She wept often at table, wondering whether the poor settlers in the West were starving, especially Aunt Zuby and Uncle Steve —if Uncle Steve were alive, which was too much to be hoped for. And Fremont always "cried easy." He would never burst into tears at table but his mother shook her head and said she knew the reason. All these things were symptoms of certain elements in his mental and moral make-up, and therefore a part of this history, as well as the history of Iowa and Monterey County. For Fremont McConkey belongs to a generation later than that of Uncle Jake Vandemark, who lived in the next township and who has gained great local celebrity through his History of Vandemark Township. Uncle Jake and his fellow settlers came to Iowa voluntarily. Fremont and his fellows were injected into the body politic by forces over which they had no control. They were not volunteers. Their psychology impinged upon the conditions of a new society. They had no personal history anterior to it. And they bore, and still bear, marks of the struggle. No student of our times should forget the curious effects upon the present generation of this march into Iowa and Iowa's experiment in community-building, of the boys and girls who never saw anything else save the frontier, but who had spirits and souls inherited from people who lived in the established societies of the East and of the South and of the Old World.

As for the pre-natal influences to which I have referred, you may laugh if you will; but while smiling, remember that every person passes through a wider range of phases of development before his birth, than after. Judged by the march of unfoldment, a man is much past middle age when he is born. If you don't believe it, I can arrange a joint debate

between you and Mrs. Frost on very short notice. Anyhow, you now have the story of how Fremont McConkey became one of the sovereigns of Iowa and of Monterey County. He lies before you, red and sniffling, as his mother looks out at the stars and listens to the wolves.

CHAPTER II

GROWTH OF A TUMBLE-WEED

KATE McCONKEY, Fremont's mother, was greatly blessed with assistants in the care of her new baby; for she had two earlier comers to help her. One of them, Abbie, was old enough to help Fremont up when he fell down, and the other, Henry, was exactly the proper age to join in a duet with Fremont when it came to making the extensive welkin of the prairies ring with their evidences of lung-power. These were joined in due time by Sarah, two years, and Frank, a little less than four years younger than Fremont. Children were then supposed to have all the juvenile diseases and survive them—at least one of these complaints, named after one of the four seasons, took heavy toll of child life, but as it was a visitation of divine judgment on a fallen race, not much could be done about it, save for the parents to do their feeble best after the attack to balk the purposes or alter the intentions of Providence. This system of having children come in relays that they might assist in rearing each other was the one which gave America her immense growth in native population up to the middle of the nineteenth century; at which time the increase was turned over to our foreigners. If by the middle of the twentieth century we have no America, it will be because this relay system has been abandoned.

Mrs. McConkey was a negligent trollop, as present-day mothers will see when I tell them that after Fremont

was able to walk he often went several days without a bath, and if when he was eight he was bathed above his knees and below his neck once a month it was because of some extraordinary accretion of soil. So long as dirt didn't show it was regarded as non-existent; and a great boy of eight or ten was expected to keep clean in the swimming-holes, so near together were they in Willow Creek. As for winter, what would you do, madam, if you had eight or nine in the family with but two rooms in the house, and only one of them heated, and you charged for such a household, with all the cooking, cleaning, sewing (and no sewing-machine), bed-making, spinning of wool, soap-making, knitting, dressmaking, tailoring, millinery, straw-plaiting for hats and many things I have forgotten? Methinks you might omit or even forget the full bath for your children for considerable intervals. Mrs. McConkey's expression to describe a fairly busy day was, "I've washed, and mopped, and baked, and brewed, and spun a run, and gone a-visiting in the afternoon." There was a sarcastic inflection on the last clause, for she did little visiting.

Fremont was as dirty as a son of a duke or knight of a few generations before. He was as ragged as a little boy must be whose mother makes his clothes, and has little with which to make them and whose days are long and toilsome. He had children with whom to play, but when a stranger came to the house, he with his brothers and sisters ran and hid, though they longed to look at and listen to this stranger from the outside world. I don't know where you'll find such children now. They were wild, not in the way we think of "wild" children, but wild as deer and foxes and hawks and rabbits are wild. They were *feræ naturæ.*

They grew like weeds, in more ways than one. In those days the prairie was a marvelous thing, clothed with tall drooping grasses, dotted with flowers, its bosom undulating in waves as graceful as those of the sea, all of them in

summer swept by ripples, dainty and small in the upland grasses, and deepening to long lenticular moving pits of sea-green shadow among the deep grasses and the flaunting weeds and willows of the lovely swales—and over it all the prairie sky; which is all that is now left of that exquisite landscape. But we were speaking of weeds. A new weed came in with the settlement of the country and the breaking of the prairie sod, here and there, in those little black oblongs which are now great farms. Ah, how small they looked! And on these newly-plowed fields there grew up as if the seeds had been awaiting the plow for ages, this new weed. It was a lovely, tender, green thing as it sprouted from the black sod, but as summer advanced it rivaled in size the plant from the mustard seed of Scripture: It grew into a great hemisphere of spiny foliage, its flat side on the ground, and its huge oval, sometimes four feet high, resting in a broad circle on the earth. And then see what nature does for the perpetuation of the race! Nature caused the root to decay as the millions of seeds ripened, and at the first strong wind of autumn, each weed fetched loose from its moorings, and rolled across the prairie like a great ball, scattering its seeds as it went. We called them tumble-weeds.

They blew from the surrounding fields of "breaking" into the feeble grove on the McConkey farm, until they topped the little trees and rolled over into the yard. They filled the margins of corn-fields for rods, especially along the west and north sides, until it was almost impossible to harvest the crop. They overwhelmed the corral on the open prairie and filled it full. Where they met with no obstacle they filled the brooks and clung to the trees in the little popple groves. But the most human thing about them was this, that where they found no anchorage, they were blown back and forth across the prairies, like lost souls in some Tartarus of aimless subjection to the god of fickleness.

When in October, the northwest wind, with a touch of winter in it, blew down on some lone prairie dwelling, then out of the dusk came these hurrying gray shapes, like a great host of hunted animals, rolled past and out of sight, or were followed by other armies of shades, hurried but noiseless like drab ghosts; and next day, perhaps, when the south wind blew up, back would come the tumble-weeds as if wondering where on all that broad plain they might find rest, but never finding it. The German immigrants, when they came in, named them "wolves." Sometimes, I used to think that the tumble-weed was more fortunate than I, for when they grew up, some wind was sure to blow them into a new neighborhood.

Well, Fremont McConkey grew up like a tumble-weed. He was a new kind of weed. He grew up on the newly-broken sod, unsowed and unnurtured, save for certain food and drink. And he was so tender and velvety and verdant when he was little! The tears come into Kate McConkey's eyes to-day when she thinks of it. But that is so with all our little boy-babies after they grow up—there is always one who remembers them when they promised never to bear a thorn or spine, and who would give worlds to feel them again so soft and sweet in her arms. As if such a plant could live in such a world! And so often, as you say it was with Fremont McConkey, when the boy attains stature, his roots decay and he pulls loose from his moorings and drifts away before the wind.

CHAPTER III

MR. MC CONKEY'S FIRST REVOLT

LITTLE Fremont "could carry a tune" before he could talk. Nature had implanted in his little soul that wonderful faculty of thrilling to music and rhythm and rhyme. He learned all the simple poems in his *McGuffey's First Reader* before he understood their words. He tingled to the tips of his grimy baby fingers as he recited:

"The lark is up to meet the sun,
The bee is on the wing,
The ant its labor has begun,
The woods with music ring."

He had no faintest impression of what "woods" are; but connected the word with the sticks his father cut for him to carry in to his mother, and which were hauled from some place away off, called "the timber." One of the first tunes he learned was that sweet old Funeral Hymn which begins, "Sister, thou wert mild and lovely," but Freemie's words were "La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la," so true to the melody that his mother's eyes would fill with tears as she heard it through the hissing of the steam as her clothes boiled, or between the bursts of humming from her spindle as she walked back and forth by her old high wheel. He was such a sweet little child!

The first song in which he felt some glimmering of meaning was a Sunday-school melody that began:

"Far out upon the prairies, how many children dwell,
Who never go to meeting or hear the Sabbath bell."

The plight of these poor children seemed to him to call for remedial action on the part of somebody. He wished he could do something for these poor prairie children. One day, after he was becoming slightly gray at the temples, he suddenly burst out laughing as he thought that he himself had been one of those poor children and had never known how unhappy and miserable he was. Here I should like to write a chapter on The Selfishness of Altruism; but I refrain, merely mentioning that this surge of feeling for the outcast children of the prairies, written for the edification of eastern Sunday-schools, gave Fremont his first impulse to public service.

At this time religion became an issue in the McConkey family. Mrs. McConkey had been brought up a Methodist. Her husband back in York State had grown up in the faith, the correct name of which I forget, but which was irreverently called the "Hard-Shell Baptist." Elder Skeels came to Monterey County in 1862 and carried on "protracted meetings" in Lithopolis, and built up the Baptist Church society there which still carries on its good work—under difficulties. Kate McConkey prayed for light and leading, and was moved to join the Baptists in the hope that Alvin might be moved by her concession and by the Spirit to renew his communion, from which she sometimes feared he had backslidden during all the long years of migration through forests, across lakes and over prairies to this wilderness, where civilization was engaged in overtaking him. She rather dated his complete backsliding to the time he had the fever and ague so bad.

Now the Hard-Shell Baptist has certain fatalistic beliefs relating to Foreordination, Election and the like, which are beyond the imagination of any uninstructed Methodist mind,

but which made the revival of Alvin McConkey's soul a good deal like trying to raise bread without yeast or emp'tin's, or after it is already light. This religious crisis in the family filled the air with debate. Elder Skeels came to visit at times, and Alvin and he had it out. Fremont's ears rang with Arminianism and Calvinism, and the things which had been wont to drench Europe with blood, and was astonished to hear his father, whom he had never seen read, talk of saving ordinances, and the perseverance of the saints, as confidently as the Elder did, and with a sort of proprietary air as if he had just invented them and had them marked "Patent Pending." At the end of which two things happened: Mrs. McConkey kept on as a good Skeels Baptist, and Fremont's father stayed backslidden—or saved, as the case may have been—refusing to fellowship with what he called Arminians. All of which had its effect on the soul of the four-year-old boy with the precocious mind groping in the darkness of controversy amid solitude.

Now about a year before this, Uncle Steve Lawless, having returned from the Spirit Lake expedition, heard of Pike's Peak and the gold which any one might pick up freely if he would but go there, and being only a matter of sixty years old, he left Aunt Zuby with the McConkeys, and pulled out for the Peak with the first train of gold-seekers; after which the usual news came back that they had been massacred by Indians—only we called it "massa-creed." This loaded the air of the family with gloom. Aunt Zuby wept and moaned at night, and as Fremont slept with her, the thing weighed heavily on his sympathetic soul. It mingled with the arguments relating to the Divine Plan.

"Ma," said he, after a long Skeels-McConkey wrestle with the devil, and a strenuous season of prayer, "did God make everything?"

"Yes, my boy." The tone was tender to dawning piety.

"Everything?" went on the neophyte, pressing his point. "Did he make rattlesnakes—and—and potato-bugs?"

Fremont was here dealing with a burning issue; for the Colorado potato-beetle, migrating in his un-American way from west to east, was, in our ignorance of Paris-green, threatening our subsistence in Iowa. Mrs. McConkey's theology allowed her no escape.

"Yes," she hesitatingly admitted, "He made 'em all; but you are too young to understand about them things."

"Did he make Injuns?" went on the uncompromising logician, who certainly *was* too young for the problem.

"Yes," said Mrs. McConkey, "I s'pose so—of course He did. He made everything under the sun!"

For a long time little Fremont was wrapped in thought. Then he delivered a speech which lived longer in the memories of all concerned, than any other utterance of his whole life, though my faith leads me to believe that when the Recording Angel wrote it down in Heaven's chancery, he used vanishing ink.

"I fink," said Fremont, handing up his decision, "that if He makes any more Injuns, He's a——"

I will not finish the speech. The reader would be shocked. I am disappointed if he is not as it stands. Shock is not the name for what Mrs. McConkey suffered. She caught her breath in horror. She almost collapsed. This was beyond whipping; but her punishment was dreadful.

"John Charles Fremont McConkey!" she exclaimed, turning on her sinning son a visage he will remember as long as he lives. "You have said an awful, awful wicked thing. To think I've lived to hear a child of mine say a thing worse'n swearin'."

When his mother said, "Why, Freemie!" in a reproachful tone, it was a rebuke. When she said "Fremont!" it was a

rebuke, reproach and injunction. "John Fremont McConkey!" was a charge of misdemeanor. But "John Charles Fremont McConkey!" was an indictment for felony. If it was worse than swearing, it could be nothing less. I do not claim for Fremont that he had at mental command all these gradations in crime, but he knew that the thing was as bad as it could possibly be.

"Now," she went on, as he quailed before her, "I want you to kneel right down here and ask God to forgive you, for you've be'n monstrous wicked!"

Fremont laid down his arms and burst into tears as he complied. It was his first revolt against the Established. The episode may throw light on his budding character. Anyhow, it proves that while, as St. Matthew assures us, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings may come perfected praise; in a lost, condemned, potato-bug and Indian-infested world, out of the same mouths sometimes cometh a thing quite the contrary.

CHAPTER IV

WAR AND PEACE

HE WAS a great big man with a black mustache and goatee. Fremont discovered him within a week after he had said that awful thing about God. At the age of four, one does not mourn and refuse to be comforted, even over past blasphemies, and Fremont was happy the day he found this black-mustached person down below the corner of the corn-field, less than a quarter of a mile from the house.

He was doing an epochal thing; but all Fremont could see was that he had got out of his buggy and was measuring something off on the prairie, and driving some stakes. Fremont was afraid of him; just as he was of any one except his parents and his brothers and sisters. Like an Indian surprised by his white foe the little four-year-old lay close. He lay very close; for he was engaged in a wonderful game when this man interrupted him. He was snaring gophers; or thought he was. He had never yet succeeded in snaring one, but he was perfecting his technique. The prairie gopher, or ground-squirrel, of Iowa is of two sorts. The smaller is colored and striped like the chipmunk of the East and of the woods, but has thirteen stripes instead of the chipmunk's five. This is the striped gopher. Its cousin, the gray gopher, is about as large as the gray squirrel of the woods, and much the same in color; but, like its striped relative, its ears and tail lack the fluffi-

ness and length which evolution for some private reason bestows on the squirrel tribe in the timber.

Fremont was engaged in war, the war of man against nature for subsistence. For the gophers had welcomed the McConkeys to the neighborhood with open mouths and gaping cheek-pouches. They had sent word out all over Section Twenty-two and parts of Twenty-one, Fifteen and Sixteen: "Come over to the picnic!" was the word which was whistled from mound to mound by the little rascals as they stood straight up on their tails. "Come over to the feast! Here's a new thing! A great two-legged creature is putting kernels of corn in the ground for us. And the good fellow is not only planting this delicious new grain, but he is marking the ground both ways, so we can tell right where to dig for it. C'mon, c'mon!"

And thus was the corn crop put in jeopardy, and the hams and bacon and side-meat for next winter, and the corn-bread for the entire year and the feed for the horses and cows imperiled as well. War was declared as a matter of necessity in McConkeyland and was regarded, no doubt, as a perfidious breach of hospitality in Gopherland. Gophers could be shot; but that took a man's time. The right way to wage war was by means of a boy, a steel-trap and a snare. Now Fremont was too young to set a steel-trap or properly manage a snare, but he had watched Henry do it, and he was now amusing himself and training himself for prairie life, having promised his mother that he wouldn't go far, and that he would be careful about rattlesnakes.

And so Fremont, like any other wild thing, lay closer to the ground when the big man with the black mustache and goatee drove up and began setting stakes. It seemed the safer policy, for surely he would drive away presently, and then we can run and tell ma about him.

When the first of the two teams, drawing heavy wagons

also drew up to the spot, the driver suddenly shouted "Whoa!" to his steeds and pulled them back on their haunches just in time to keep them from trampling young Mr. McConkey into the rich loamy soil of Monterey County.

"What's the matter, Nate?" asked the black mustache.

Nate stood on his load and peered over between the horses' necks.

"Gether up that young one," said he, "so I kin drive up."

The black mustache went over and looked down at Fremont quizzically. Then he stooped and picked him up, and noting how he flinched at a stranger's touch, he began ingratiating himself with the boy, and in five minutes, they were not only friends but sworn brothers.

"If we'd 'a' known," said he, "that you was snarin' gophers here, we wouldn't have come till to-morrow, bub. It wasn't right to stop your work. If you want us to, we'll drive right away. How much do you git f'r gophers' tails anyhow?"

"One cent f'r the striped ones, an' two f'r the grays," replied Fremont.

"Was that a gray or a striped one you was snarin' when Nate drove up and sp'iled your day's work?" asked the man.

No answer. Nate had finished the unloading of his building stone, and was now helping the driver of the second wagon. Fremont began moving over to these stones. They were new to him, and marvels. He wanted time to examine them. Why, just having these stones to play with and over, and to look at, and to wonder about, would make a new place of the neighborhood! He wanted to ask the man if he were intending to leave them there, but he was too shy.

"Know what we're buildin' here?" asked the man, at last.

"A play-house?" suggested Fremont.

"Wal, Raws," said the man he had called Nate, "more stone to-morrow?"

"More stone till I tell you to stop," said the black mustached man whose name Fremont now had learned was "Raws."

"No, bubby," said he, resuming the conversation, "it ain't goin' to be a play-house. Fur from it. Nor a workhouse, either. It's the house that keeps you from the workhouse when you git old—if you use it right, my son," said he, and Fremont thought he sounded like Elder Skeels, though when he said it he winked at Nate. "Make good use of this edifice, and the presidential chair is within your grasp! It's goin' to be a schoolhouse. Ain't that fine?"

"How long you goin' to stay and play with the young one?" asked Nate. "We'll want you down at the river when we load up."

"Don't think I'm wastin' time with the young one," he returned. "W'y, in seventeen or eighteen years he may have the castin' vote in a convention or election. Get the boys as they come up, is the motto of Roswell Upright. Here, bub! Here's a penny to pay you f'r the gopher we kep' you from ketchin'. Comin' over to see your pap and mama next time I'm out!"

If it had been a few years earlier in Iowa history, Fremont and his brothers and sisters would have learned to read, write and cipher at their own fireside or not at all. But Monterey County was far enough back from the Mississippi and forward from A. D. 1 to be entering upon a new area. All that land over which Fremont snared gophers, hunted the nests of prairie chickens, gathered flowers, watched the formation of storms, herded cattle, hunted wild-fowl, listened to the orchestration of the birds, leaped sidewise in fear of the rattlesnake as the locust sprung its rattle, picked up stubs of grass to fester in his

bare feet and saw his fellow tumble-weeds rolling back and forth in the wind, like the wandering families of the frontier, one scattering tumble-weed seed, and the other the seed of human society,—all that land except the almost invisible germs of farmsteads, was owned by men who had bought it at auction from the government, but who lived elsewhere. If it had been a little farther back from the Mississippi and a few years later, it would have been owned by the government and open to homestead entry. But here that great character on the stage of the Iowa drama, the Non-Resident Owner had become a factor in the problem.

All this vacant land was taxable, and Mr. "Raws" Upright was engaged in the industry of spending upon it in public improvements—and private ones—the taxes collected. Alvin McConkey had located on the Northwest Quarter of Section Twenty-two, and any old settler will understand that right at his northwest corner was the proper site for the schoolhouse of Sub-District Number Five, so severely mathematical were things in a society growing up according to the United States Land Survey. If there were only the children of the McConkey family to make use of this schoolhouse, what was that to Mr. Upright and the school authorities of the county, and what were similar lacks in population to the Board of Supervisors who appropriated money for the building of bridges, court-houses, jails and the like?

The Non-Resident Owner was a speculator. He was waiting to reap profits from the increase in the value of the lands through the development of society and the growth of population. He was making no improvements, buying no goods in the stores, shouldering none of the burdens of the new society—except the payment of taxes. He was actually excluding people from settlement except at his own terms by holding his lands out of use. Why not, then, said, Mr. Upright, make him pay for the improvements which

would raise the value of his lands so that he will have to pay more taxes and give Mr. Upright more contracts? It was an endless chain; and if it broke by forcing the Non-Resident Owner to sell his holdings, why, settlers would buy and build houses and make a real community instead of a waste. And as for taxing the man who built a house, on the value of the house, why do that? He was doing a good thing for the community, buying lumber, hiring carpenters, and patronizing the stores. Tax him on his improvements? By no means.

Iowa had a crude approximation to the single tax before Mr. Henry George was born; and if she had perfected it, eliminating the Uprights from the operation, it would have been a wonderful thing for this generation, in which the young farmers of Monterey County are driven out from Iowa by land values that have in these early 'nineties gone up to ridiculous heights of from forty dollars to sixty dollars an acre, which young men can not pay. So they are driven forth, as I have said, to the arid lands of the West and to the towns, and we are becoming right here in this county, a people composed of landlords and tenants, as bad as Ireland, and—but I fear I am overstepping the historian's proper limitations.

The McConkeys had walked with bowed heads and stooped backs for four generations—heads bowed to pass under the branches of the forests of our Eastern States, backs bowed under the load of the forest's burden on the people who must lift it from the land and find the fields under it. And as they were of those who went in advance of their fellows, they paid the price in ignorance of everything but the very unimportant matters involved in the planting of cities, communities, and states, of integrity, love of home and fanatical devotion to one another. You see, they were in darkness. Their manners will offend you. But all hail to the Non-Resident Owner and to the Ros-

well Uprights who made a specialty of spending the taxes! The McConkeys had come out of the darkness of the forests into the Light of the Prairies.

I have shown you our hero engaged in the war for subsistence; but as we are now four years old, and were born in 1857, the historian will note that there is another war waging, for the existence of the nation. A family that named its boy John Charles Fremont is naturally powerfully moved to save the Union; just as the same family would have been thrilled for state rights had it lived where the same boy would have been named John Calhoun or Breckenridge McConkey. The pure flame of patriotism is so often, like Hancock's tariff, a local issue. It was from this summer that Fremont dates one of his first memories. The only one which antedates it was the time when Doctor Bliven brought little Sarah in his medicine case.

Fremont remembers vividly the night when his father came home from a war-meeting and told his mother that he'd made up his mind to enlist. He remembers how his mother trembled, as she swayed on her feet, and gently sank down in a chair. Fremont was lying in his trundle-bed, which had been pulled out for him as the evening wore on, and was awakened out of his first sleep by the noise of his father's entrance and his calling for the lantern. He now got up in his little nightgown—for he was not yet old enough to sleep in the shirt he had worn all day—and crept to his mother's knee, looking first at her pale drawn face as she planned ways to keep herself and her three little ones alive out there on this awful prairie, alone, with nothing to do with, and no one to help. Then as his father spoke, Fremont looked up into his countenance, which was quite like yellowed ivory in the tanned area above his beard. Alvin McConkey saw the trembling of his wife's hand, which trembling Fremont felt as she stroked his yellow hair.

"You'll be cared for," said Alvin. "That'll be all right, Kate. Governor Wade says he'll see to it that every woman left behind by them that enlists is took care of."

"Yes," said Kate, with circumflex that Fremont understood, "this land o' desolation's full o' folks that Governor Wade's took care of. I think I see him! No, Al, git that idee out of your head. I'll have to tangle with nakedness and starvation, while you free niggers!"

"It hain't to free niggers!" protested Alvin. "It's to save the Union!"

"It'll break up one union," said Kate, "an' the only one I've cared much for."

"Ma," said Fremont, and when she did not answer, he pressed against her knee and kept repeating, "Ma! Ma!" until she turned her agonized face down to him.

"W'y, pa kin go," said he. "Abbie kin take care of little Henry and I won't have anything to do but to take care of you. Pa can go to the war!"

"You blessed baby!" she cried.

And then something took place, which, after all, is probably what made Fremont remember it. He had never seen such a thing before. His father took Kate in his arms and kissed her, and held her without saying a word, until Fremont cried—it was so extraordinary a thing in this family of stoical American pioneers.

Fremont was studying long division before he heard anything more about this matter of going to war. His father could wait no longer then, and volunteered. But Doctor Bliven, who examined him, said he couldn't go on account of his legs. Alvin, in telling the family about it in much humiliation when he got home, said that Doc said the veins in his legs were too close. The Doc said the veins were very close. It was not long after that Fremont was engaged in studying physiology, and when he came to the passage on varicose veins, it suddenly dawned on his young

mind that Doctor Bliven must have said "varicose" instead of "very close." Anyhow these veins kept Alvin McConkey out of the war; but out of no other hardship or exertion as far as the family could see.

CHAPTER V

FREMONT'S WORLD EXPANDS

OCTOBER! The tumble-weeds were rolling to and fro across the great prairie in greater hordes than ever; for there was more "new breaking" this year on which they took their shallow roots and grew. They filled Willow Creek just below the McConkey Schoolhouse until the horses, which once every few days crossed on the little plank bridge, waded in weeds as through a desiccated flood. And one morning, as a horde of the tumble-weeds rolled over the low hill before a northwest wind, two children came with them; two forms as brown and dingy as the weeds themselves. They stood on the far side of the brook until the teacher rang a bell, and the little group of pupils went in to their lessons. Then they walked very slowly to the bridge, crossed it, and stole, rather than walked, up to the building which Mr. Raws Upright had called an edifice.

One was a boy about nine years old; the other a girl of five or six. They wore the ordinary clothing of farm children; the girl a woolen dress of red and black checks, for which the yarn had been spun at home, and the fabric woven in some little mill along one of the streams of Iowa. The boy had on a worn corduroy coat under which he was clothed in blue denim trousers, and a hickory shirt. The trousers were supported by "galluses" made of their own fabric. Both children were barefooted. The girl had a

sunbonnet hanging on her back by the strings which were caught across her throat. The boy carried in his hand a tattered wool hat. In other words, they were dressed as were most boys and girls of their age in Iowa on a mild autumn day in 1861.

There was something unusual, however, about these two children. The girl lagged back of her brother, as if steeling herself to approach some danger to dare which she trusted to him. His face was set as if that danger were regarded as a mortal one. Both had sallow complexions, yellowed by pallor underneath a deep coat of tan. Their eyes were dark and deep-set, and their expressions were unchildlike. One given to exaggeration might have said that they were the eyes of brutes, but this would have been unfair. They were bullet eyes set back under unyouthfully prominent brows projecting from bullet heads. They were countenances of the sort one finds in that class of frontiersmen who lived from choice in dugouts and log-cabins, who preferred to be in advance of their fellows for reasons of temperament, and who, because of their manner of life, only one degree above that of the savage, naturally moved along the lines of watercourses, and were more numerous in regions of mild climate. One man of this type once said that he hated the things people called good houses. "I want to live," said he, "so when I wants ter move, all I got to do is to empty the skillet on the fiah an' call the dogs."

Determination was evidently in control of this boy in blue denim; for he marched boldly up to the schoolhouse. Vacillation may have caused him and his sister to reach the schoolhouse at the time of the forenoon's recess; but hesitation was apparently over. For he walked up to the door, and made as if to open it and enter.

"I reckon you go in?" he said to his sister.

"Maybe they'd lick ye," said she.

He walked around to the side of the schoolhouse, and

sought a toe-hold in the stones, the bringing of which had been so interesting to Fremont McConkey, and which were now firmly set in mortar under the building.

"What ye goin' to do?" whispered the little girl.

"Keep still!" commanded the boy. "Ain't ye got no sense?"

Softly he inserted his toe in a niche in the foundation wall, slowly he pulled himself up by means of fingers somehow clinging to the sloping window-sill, and insidiously he raised his head above the lower edge of the glass so that he could peep into the school-room. No fox invading a poultry yard was ever a more perfect picture of alert caution and determined fear than this boy reconnoitering the place which at the moment he should have been occupying —and at his feet, looking this way and that, as if on guard, stood the strange little girl. The boy saw across the room, as his eyes topped the window-sill, a map of the hemispheres in colors. As lower areas came in view, he saw a little square of blackboard, on which were strange figures in white; and as he conquered the height so as to be able to look downward into the room, he found himself gazing straight into the eyes of a small boy with hair like tow, who had before him a huge atlas opened at the map of Africa.

The boy dropped to the ground as lightly as a cat, and seized the girl by the hand. They scudded to a patch of high grass near by, and dropped into the covert like quail. And just then, the figure of what they thought a very lovely lady, came around the corner of the house, and standing off from them as if to assure them that she was not meaning them any interference, she said:

"You must hurry in, children. This is your first day, and if you hurry in I won't mark you late."

Smiling, she gave her hand to the little girl and, still smiling, she brushed the grass and earth from her little dress, all the time moving them slowly toward the school-

house door. She had seen wild children before. She hung up the little girl's sunbonnet on a hook in the entry, told the boy where to hang his hat, and then said to the older child:

"My name is Mary Livermore; what is your name?"

"Bent," said he. "Hern's Sal."

"And your last name?"

"Bushyager," said the boy. "Bently Bushyager and Sarah Jane Bushyager. I'm nine year old, an' she's goin' on six. Mam said we'd got to go to school, an' pap said he didn't give a damn if we did."

The shocked teacher eased them insidiously into the room, gave Sally a seat with a little girl who had just settled with her family on Section Fifteen, and found Bent Bushyager a place by himself. She knew that the new pupils belonged to the family of Bowie Bushyager, of the notorious tribe that had settled in the brush along the river when the county was an almost unbroken wilderness, and whose aloofness from the real settlers had already caused whisperings when strange horses were brought into the neighborhood to be sold, or when resident animals mysteriously disappeared. I have already described their kind. The association of the Bushyager name with schools was a new juxtaposition of ideas; but the teacher's duty was clear. She must teach them, for they had come three miles from over in the west where there was as yet no school.

Out of the corner of his eye, Fremont McConkey watched Mary Livermore's maneuvers with Bent and Sally. The little girl was an easy problem, since she knew nothing of what she was supposed to learn in school. It was a case of A B C's with Sally. With Bent it was a different matter. He had somehow imbibed the notion that he knew the First Reader, and had brought with him a *McGuffey's Second Reader*. Presently, Fremont found Bent edging into the seat with him, urged by the teacher.

"Bently is going to sit with you," said Mary, "and I'll

let you help him in his Second Reader lesson, Fremont. So you may whisper, but don't make any noise."

The two boys sat as far apart as the seat would allow, Fremont in new brown denim trousers and a red knitted wammus which he wore because he was proud of it, and not for warmth. Bently looked at this with evident disfavor. Fremont was too much interested in the matter of the help he was to give to this boy twice his size, to draw any critical distinction between his clothes and Bently's. The two strange boys went through much the same system of approaches as two young bulls turned for the first time into the same pasture. Bently, at last, opened his Second Reader on the desk. Fremont moved over and looked at the exposed pages. It lay open at the cabalistic word "PREFACE" which every child saw as soon as he opened his book, but which none of them understood—hence, they wove magic about it. Pointing at it, Bent Bushyager whispered, moving his finger from one letter to the next until he had finished the word:

"*P* for Peter, *R* for Rat, *E* for Emory, *F* for Fat, *A* for Andrew, *C* for Cat, *E* for Emory ketched a rat."

Now mark the abyss between June and October for a genius! In June, Fremont would not have been able even to understand this rigmarole. Now it was Old Stuff for him, and he was able to cap it with something far more powerful in its implications. He began with the first letter of "Preface," and not only went to the end of it, but backward from the end to the beginning, thus:

"*P*eter *R*ice *E*ats *F*ish, *A*lligators *C*atches *E*els,

"*E*els *C*atches *A*lligators, *F*ish *E*ats *R*aw *P*otaters."

Fremont had taken the first trick, and Bently's head tended to bow as to a master. This little bit of nothing that was to help him get his lesson had reeled glibly off to him a great lesson in science. It stated tersely the struggle for existence, the survival of the fittest, and somewhat inac-

curately the relation between animal and vegetable life; and it made of the word "Preface" something more significant than Bently had ever dreamed it could be, quite overshadowing, as prefaces sometimes do, the text itself.

It was now Fremont's play. He opened his Fourth Reader at the fly-leaf, and pointed to a text scrawled in pencil on it and noting that Bently seemed not quite able to decipher it, he read in Bently's ear:

"If you wish my name to see,
Look on page 103."

Bently turned slowly and uncertainly to page 103 and found a scribbled text on the margin of the page. He appealed by a glance to Fremont for aid, and Fremont read:

"You're a fool for looking here!"

Bently scowled darkly. The thing violated his conception of the fitness of things. Why was he a fool for looking on page 103 for his minute seat-mate's name? It was a dark mystery to the Bushyager mind, and one which evoked dim urges of revenge. Perhaps he had now better play his last card, thought he—and did so; he pointed to a text in red ink in the back of the Second Reader, which Bent had never written, but which ought to have given pause to Fremont in his trend toward collision with Bently; for it read: "Steel not this book fur feer of yer life; fer its oner carries a butcher-nife."

Fremont shrunk back to his own side of the seat. Bent moved over toward him, and to relieve the situation, showed Fremont a gopher-snare taken from the pocket nearest Fremont. Fremont showed him a bird drawn on a slate, which he regarded as his masterpiece. Mary Livermore, seeing that the gentlemen had become acquainted, came over and

told them what work she wanted Bently to do, and gave Fremont instructions as to helping him. The acquaintance between Fremont McConkey and the Bushyagers had auspiciously begun.

I know what the critic of the common school will say to this: He will say that it is an agency for throwing innocent Fremonts, sons of praying Kate McConkeys into intimate associations with outcast Bushyagers, who are mischievous or criminal in their inherent traits, and that evil communications corrupt good manners. But the critic forgets that this very common school is the agency created by these very people themselves for their own enlightenment. It is a torch made and lighted by those in darkness. It throws on the screen of Time the motto: "Every Man His Own Prometheus!" And it succeeds. Even in this matter of association, the boy or girl who passes through the common schools, comes out with a most valuable experience in the matter of choosing intimates. He has learned to act for himself. And parents who have committed their children to these institutions, are never called upon to lament the fact that, while they have sought diligently and with much expenditure to find the most desirable associates for their children in exclusive schools, after all, they have not saved them from association with school-fellows as vicious and criminal in their inherent tendencies as any Bushyager in Monterey County.

The discerning reader has I hope done me the honor to marvel somewhat at the progress made by Fremont between June and October; but I have already said that Fremont was a genius—"odd," "queer," or "great" as the neighbors were fond of saying—but a genius. He began asking Raws Upright the names of the letters on the packing boxes and bags in the piles of building material before the schoolhouse was begun. Once over his first attack of bashfulness, he lived about that building operation, until

Raws called him Mr. Inspector. In a week he had mastered all the literature stenciled or written on the job.

"Mis' McConkey," said Mr. Upright one day just as the roof was going on, "that little feller of yourn's got more in his head than a fine comb'll take out."

"Good land, I hope so," said Mrs. McConkey. "He'll need it!"

"Brains, he's got," said Raws.

"Must have all his forebears have lacked for generations," said Kate. "An' gosh, if he's got 'em all he'll be a human whirlwind."

She was inwardly pleased at this confirmation of her suspicions that in little Freemie she had conferred something great and beautiful upon the world. In this opinion, which, of course, no other mother has ever adopted with reference to a son, she was confirmed by what developed as soon as the school in Sub-District Number Five got well under way. Abbie, Henry and Fremont represented the McConkey family in a school which sometimes rose in numbers to almost a dozen pupils; for the county was settling up. And Fremont "took to learnin'" amazingly. Those mysterious relations between the letters and their sounds which kept poor Henry McConkey in a daze, seemed very natural and inevitable to Fremont. *McGuffey's First Reader* lasted him less than a month after he had learned his letters. The spring or summer term was deferred because of the unfinished condition of the schoolhouse, so there were six straight months of school with no vacation. Fremont, living close to the school, was always present and ever punctual. And the printed page was a mania with him. It was because there were so many hard words in the Geography that Fremont liked it so well. He learned the Third Reader by hearing the class recite. He knew *Casabianca* by heart while he was still detained in the Third Reader; and while he was in the Fourth, which was be-

fore the six months were past, his lips moved as he repeated with the Fifth Reader class that lesson (I wonder who wrote the piece!) beginning "We must educate! We must educate! or we perish in our own prosperity."

He had an idea that perishing was something bad. He had a fairly good notion as to what it was to educate. But what that prosperity was in which we were likely to perish he could not even surmise. He was not the first, nor the last Memorus Wordwell who mastered the spelling and pronunciation of words, long before he was capable of understanding what he read. Yet, his mind was of that type which receives a strange stimulation from its dim approximations to comprehension, from mere familiarity with mysterious words, and with thoughts several sizes too large for it; as one might be imagined to take in virtue from handling bales of treasures of unknown contents. Pregnant words went into the cellar of his mind and spirit, later to become fuel in those fires which spring up in the adolescent intellect.

"It took Rome three hundred years to die," goes one of these passages in the Fifth Reader lesson just mentioned, "and our death, if we perish, will be as much more terrible than hers as our growth has been more rapid and vigorous." This sentence when he came to read it, thrilled Fremont with a delicious horror. Three hundred years dying! And our death—he knew only that "our" included himself and his loved ones in some way—yet more terrible! It was epic. And when he read it, which was the next term, he was only five years old. The news for Fremont's thirst for learnin' went abroad through all Buchanan Township, and even spread to a few in Monterey Centre. Mrs. Absalom Frost reckoned over her data to see if she had not made some mistake as to where the Sign was when he was born, and shook her head. When little Freemie read *The Death of the Flowers* with tears running down his cheeks, Mrs. McConkey

felt sure that his heart was rendered over-tender by the Spirit Lake Massacre, the Hard Winter of 1856-7, or the awful Bran Bread episode, or by all of them. And Fremont was rejoicing in having found a friend in Bent Bushyager, who, though twice Fremont's age, had somehow taken on loyalty and subordination to him owing to Fremont's mastery of the books which were too much for Bently.

Fremont's world was expanding marvelously. His friendship with the outlaw Bushyager family had begun. To be sure, we did not know then just the extent to which they were or were to be outlaws. If we had, and if Mrs. Frost had known of this intimacy, she would have shaken her head more emphatically. Her doubt, if she had any, as to where the Sign was would have been dispelled. I wonder where it actually was!

CHAPTER VI

PERISHING OF PROSPERITY

ONE night Alvin McConkey sat by his warm stove with little Fremont upon his knee. The younger ones had taken Fremont's place in the trundle-bed, and he had acquired the right to sit up with the rest of the family. He was playing with his father's fingers, trying to build them into something—into anything he could imagine they resembled; the thick, knobby, cracked fingers of huge broad hands, transformed to wood, stone, soil and ordure, in which they had so long worked; and weathered, as such things weather in nature, into things to the clean mind sweet and acceptable. One of the fingers was off at the first joint, and Fremont was a little impatient with it because it would not pile up evenly with the others. He was about to ask his father to tell him again how he lost it, but was interrupted. There was a hello outside.

His mother, who had laid aside her knitting and was indulging in her sole luxury, her clay pipe, now put down the pipe also.

"Uncle Steve!" said she. "I must git him some supper."

Fremont's face glowed with delight as he stood in the door and peered out across the snow at the shadowy object which he knew for Uncle Steve's horses and sleigh; delight, because Uncle Steve Lawless was always as amusing as a book. He came in laughing, slapping his great sheepskin mittens together, and pulling the frost from his iron-gray beard.

"Hello, Freemie," said he in a low tone, so as not to wake up Sarah and Frank in the trundle-bed. "Why hain't you readin'?"

"I hain't had anything to read for a long time," said Fremont.

"Shockins on!" exclaimed Uncle Steve, "we'll haf' to fix that. Now if any one should wake you up in the middle of the night an' ask who's got somethin' f'r you, you tell 'em you don't know. Tell 'em to come an' ask Uncle Steve."

This wonderful uncle never under any circumstances said anything as other people would say it. Fremont's precocity may have been stimulated by the mental training of trying to find out what Uncle Steve's conversation meant.

"What is it! What is it! A book, Uncle Steve. A book?"

"Jes' clap one eye on that," said Uncle Steve, handing Fremont a brick shaped package, "an' the other on that, an' weep, Freemie. Don't git much f'r *me,* Kate. Jes' eight or ten cups o' coffy, an' a few bread an' butter, an' a cold suckin' pig—anything, 'r nothin'll satisfy me. No hurry. Had a few meals from time to time as I come along. Come around to bring these bundles to Freemie, an' to have a powwow with Al."

Fremont's older brother, Henry, had crawled out of his bed and pulled on his trousers. He looked momentarily at the book and the pile of paper in which Fremont was absorbed, and then his attention was fixed upon what Uncle Steve was saying to his father. Uncle Steve, as if announcing a revolution, as in fact he was, stated that the Legislature had passed the Herd Law, and the governor had signed it.

Alvin McConkey rose to his feet in hot anger.

"Did Walter Byington vote for it?" he asked.

"He put it through," replied Uncle Steve. "It was his William."

Kate gave her uncle a little smile, to show him that she understood his pun; but Alvin missed the point.

"Byington promised me if he was elected, he wouldn't vote f'r no herd law, if I'd vote fer him," roared Alvin. "He's an infarnal traitor."

"How come, promised?" asked Uncle Steve.

"He wanted my vote," said Alvin, "and I says to him, says I, 'How air you on the Herd Law?' an' he said, 'Don't you worry about my vote on the Herd Law, Mr. McConkey! I'm *right* on the Herd Law!' An' I like an ininfarnal fool walked straight to the polls an' voted for him, blast his infarnal eyes!"

"Done as he told yeh both ways," said Uncle Steve, "voted for him, an' didn't worry. That's what I call stickin' to y'r ticket. An' he'll bawl from the hilltops that he *was* right, jes' as he told yeh. Slick, I call that. Lied to yeh, and kep' his self-respect without a nick in it. Wal, now, Al, yeh can't kill him for it—hang yeh as quick as if he was a human bein'. So I've come to open y'r eyes an' tell yeh how you c'n kind of make the wrath of God sarve yeh."

Uncle Steve went on to show that scarcely anybody among the new settlers would be able to fence their farms. What then? Alvin could think of no alternative. Why, Uncle Steve pointed out, some people would operate on the unfenced prairie where grass was free, herds in which they would keep under control the live stock of their neighbors. The person running the herds would be paid by the owners. Thus Alvin, and especially Alvin's two boys and extra horse, could sell to the neighbors the grass of the speculators, and make the cattle gather it. By this time Fremont had left his reading matter and was leaning over his father's knee.

Alvin was slow to see the point. He was a born forest-

dweller. When the settlers came into Iowa they were quite unfit for prairie life. A similar number of Russians from the Steppes would have been far better adapted to the prairies. The Russians would not have made the mistake of settling in the forest belts with millions of acres of fertile prairie ready cleared by nature for the plow, or of laboring winter and summer for years splitting rails and using them to fence the farms. After our settlers entered upon the prairie lands, this was at first a Herculean labor, and soon became an impossible task. Some policy differing from the ancient practises had to be adopted.

Then the Herd Law, as it was called, became an issue. It divided communities. It engendered bitterness. It made and marred political careers; but inevitably, the Herd Law won. It forbade the running at large of live stock. The settler who had no cattle was freed from the burden of fencing and if he had only a cow or two, he staked them out, or picketed them as we would now call the operation. Or if he had a growing herd, his children watched them. And now, in Monterey County, people were to be forced to do one of these things, or to fence their pastures, while their crops were to be allowed to run at large—to run at large in a golden flood over those undulating steppes of black land.

Uncle Steve was in a small way the constructive mind for the McConkey family. He was a wood-hauler, plying between the river and the prairie town of Monterey Centre, and he said he knew of maybe a hundred head of stock along the roads. In the two towns were many more. By spring, he was sure they could get together a herd of enough cattle to make the McConkey herd profitable. The faces of Henry and Fremont were alight with interest. They felt themselves transformed, the one into an earner of the money the family so much needed, and the other into a vaquero—as respective questions indicated.

"Will folks pay us for herding their cows?" asked Henry. "How much will they pay us?"

"Do you s'pose, ma," asked Fremont of the one who would be most likely to understand the importance of the query, "that we could do better if I had a spotted horse, an' a revolver, an' a lasso, an' a saddle, an' pants with hair on 'em?"

It had taken Fremont only a few minutes to find enough in the reading matter which some unknown friend had sent him to elicit this question. One was that old History of Ohio which deals with the state county by county and town by town. It had the first fifty pages missing, but Fremont was used to casualties of this sort, and could find satisfaction in half a page blowing before the wind. He became a specialist in Ohio history, and still remembers Xenia, Galliopolis, Dayton, Springfield, Cleveland, Toledo, Columbus and the rest as they appeared in those old wood-cuts. In this volume he met Andrew and Adam Poe, those great men in the frontier, in peace and war; he withheld his hand from Simon Girty, who joined the Indians, and was likened to a sheep-killing dog and called a renegade; he suffered with Mrs. Judge Kingsbury, who nearly starved right beside Kingsbury Run, now in Cleveland, and his heart beat with anxiety as he followed her when she shot a wild turkey and thus saved herself and her baby from starvation while alone in her cabin; he had contempt for General St. Clair, who allowed the Indians to defeat him—which defeat he read in many stanzas like those in the Ballad of Chevy Chase. He read the most interesting things first, and then for months pored over the prosy details of population and production. I can scarcely state his passion for reading in stronger terms than to add that at that time he would have read *Sartor Resartus* or the *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Everything printed was grist to his mill.

"That history of Ohio," said Uncle Steve, "was sent

to yeh by Pete Bemisdarfer, the Dunkard preacher. Thinks you might be a kind of a throw-back an' like it because your ma is from Ohio. The story papers was give yeh by Fillmore Ashe's wife up to the Centre. Mary Livermore told her about yeh. They's three hull years of the *New York Ledger* there—an', Kate, Bishop Hall's sermons comes out on one page."

It was well that he mentioned the good bishop; for Mrs. McConkey's suspicions had been aroused by the revolver, and the pants with hair on 'em, that these papers contained novels, and that therefore it would be sinful to read them. They looked the papers over carefully and decided that they were not novels at all, though nearer to them than *The Scottish Chiefs, Thaddeus of Warsaw* and *The Children of the Abbey* which one of the neighbors had in Ohio, and which were true stories. Otherwise why did so many people name their daughters "Helen Mar"? You found them in so many families, and "William Wallace" too.

After Mrs. McConkey had read the opening chapter of *Wedded, Yet No Wife* in Freemie's papers, she said she hoped she could find time to finish it, so as to see how the fool thing came out. If they had been novels, she said, they would have had yellow backs and been sold for ten cents each. She was of the opinion that it was proper for a professor to read these stories, and she would let Freemie keep them if he would promise not to neglect his milking, and Uncle Steve might tell Mis' Ashe and Pete Bemisdarfer that they were much obliged. By "a professor" Mrs. McConkey did not mean a member of the faculty, but one who has been saved, and professed religion and joined the Congregation of God.

This literature which evoked these acute bits of criticism, was sent to Fremont because of his rising fame, which was spreading over the country-side. The loving friends who advertised him most were Uncle Steve and his

teachers; for his father and mother held firmly to the practise that any boast on their part would be out of taste, and that they must assume as impartial parents that their children were in all things equal. Fremont was always shocked when he read of any parents having a favorite child. Such a thing in his family was inconceivable.

I wish I could tell you of the heterogeneous mass of printed matter which this reputation brought to Fremont. Without exception, almost, it came from people lacking literary taste or culture, who sent just what they had. But I can only pause to lay a wreath on the biers of Robert Bonner of the *New York Ledger*, Street & Smith who published the *New York Weekly*, its great competitor, and whoever it was in Philadelphia who got out *The Saturday Night*.

All praise to them from a great people famished for reading! They brought to thousands and thousands of humble, isolated homes the nearest approach to literature that was available, in a day when books were costly and the good magazines were not only more so, but were pitched in a tone too high or too dull for these low-brows of mine. Any reading is better than none, and these men fed the starving and gave drink to those thirsting for romance. They spiced up their wares with love, hate, adventure, royalty, sages, fools, robbery, arson, war, palms and pines, pining and pillage, seas, deserts, mountains, rocks, fells, bogs, dens and shades of death; they left the heroine hanging by one fair and jeweled hand over the yawning jaws of the beast which stood with its paw on the hero's breast, just above the line "continued in our next"; they ran the gauntlet of whips in the hands of the moralists and the puritans, many of whom dipped into them just to see what was in them, rather deeper than was necessary for that purpose solely, but they never lowered the level of their superlative morality; they never allowed the interest to flag; and they

gave to millions otherwise walled in by a prisoning life, a glimpse of another world. What's that? A false world? Yes, but mark this—*another!*

Peace to their ashes. They were laborers worthy of their hire. And if there be in the American character any vein of generous, even though Quixotic sentiment, any tendency to champion the cause of the oppressed, and to slip it under the bedclothes when mother comes by, as they did the tattered old weeklies—whatever of good or ill there is of these which we possess, we owe to some extent to those mid-nineteenth century publishers for the mob, who so delighted in serving up high intrepidity and generous enthusiasm piping hot each week.

The McConkey herd took Fremont away from Mary Livermore and Bent Bushyager that next summer, to the green wastes, the swales enameled with flowers and flooded with verdure, the brooks hidden under the drooping grasses and paved with the braided glories of shining pebbles, and the air vibrant with the call of the wild-fowl and song-birds of the prairie. The herd and the prairie absorbed Henry and Fremont in one of the sweetest of all intimacies, that of two boys herding cattle together on the prairies, and taking fair weather and foul together; but by the next spring the stern demands of the farm called upon Henry, and Fremont, on old Doll, whose suckling colt ran by her side, with Tige the big, worthless but affectionate old dog, went forth at sunrise with the cattle and stayed with them until dusk as they grazed the rolling downs of the speculators' lands.

I erred just now when I spoke of the herd's taking him from Mary Livermore and Bent Bushyager, for Bent had gone back with his family into the brush along the river, and Fremont had lost him. It is light on the prairies, and there be people who love darkness rather than light for reasons of their own. Bent went with his family, then and afterward. Fremont lost Mary Livermore, too, leaving

her lap wet with his tears, and taking away a head of damp hair from those she dropped on it.

A great tragedy had taken place. The McConkeys had lost their farm. Careless of them, you may say; but there are extenuating circumstances. They had come out from Ohio in 1856 with money enough to buy the land, and pay for it—they thought—but while they were floating down the Ohio, plowing up the Mississippi, and teaming it across from Dubuque to Monterey County, "prosperity" had been at work. You remember the text in the Fifth Reader which excited Fremont's alarm by predicting that we shall perish in our own prosperity? Well, people told Alvin McConkey that it was unexampled prosperity which had increased the price of land so far beyond what it was when he left Ohio that the sum he brought with him was only half what was now required. Clearly, it must be better for them to be required to pay a high price for that plot of ground which Alvin and Kate had always been struggling to own, but it was hard to appreciate it.

But Jason Holbrook came to his rescue, and loaned him what he lacked, at twenty-four per cent. a year interest. Usurious, you say? Well, had he not been allowed his usury, Jason Holbrook might not have been there with the money—and then we should have lacked Monterey's great banking firm of Holbrook & Smythe, and young Paul Holbrook who afterward became our chief highbrow and reformer—and, which is of more importance to this history, Alvin McConkey might not have bought any land.

This was, as I have said in 1856. The panic of 1857 did two things to the McConkey family; it caused land to fall in price, so that after it had also made it impossible for Alvin to pay an installment or two of interest, the new farm, even enriched as it was by the birth of Fremont, was really not very good security for the mortgage. You

would have said the same thing had you been in Mr. Holbrook's place. A Kansas bard at a later time wrote:

"A chattel mortgage in the West
Is like a cancer in the breast;
It eats and eats——"

The Holbrook mortgage was not of the chattel variety, but at twenty-four per cent. per annum, it ate heartily and licked its chops for more. It ate Alvin up. The Legislature of Iowa in its wisdom had said ten years before—or its committee had—that "money is a commodity which rises and falls as it becomes scarce or plentiful, and that to fix the reward of the lender by law is unjust to both borrower and lender, and in all ways disadvantageous," and so left the matter. The cancer was unaffected by law. In two or three years Alvin's mortgage had spread all over the value of the bit of nature's breast which it covered, since Mr. Holbrook could see no point in foregoing any part of his interest.

But he was friendly. Alvin had never seen him more genuinely friendly than when he called him in one day for a final settlement. Alvin was convinced that he had no better friend in the world than Jason Holbrook.

"I'll be liberal with you," said Jason, who was from the state of Maine and showed it in his speech. "This land hain't wuth what I've got ag'in' it; but if yew'll save me foreclosure proceedin's, I'll make it an objec' to yeh. I'll give yeh ten dollars to give me a quit-claim deed."

I regret to report that Alvin did not appreciate this generosity. He was possessed of a certain curious desire to be a Freeholder, having always been a Leaseholder. To attain this goal he had toiled and moiled, cut trees, logged off fields, migrated, and finally emerged into the Light of the Prairies; and now if that Light be turned to Darkness, how

great was that Darkness! So he pounded on Jason's desk and shouted redfacedly that he would be condemned if he would deed away his home! But the next day the sheriff served on him a paper which had at the top the legend, "Original Notice" which notified Alvin McConkey and Kate McConkey, his wife, that an action had been begun against them entitled "Holbrook vs. McConkey et al," and adjuring them to appear and defend the same before noon of the second day of the next term of court which would be begun and holden, etc., etc., etc. So Kate and Alvin, not redfacedly now, went back to Jason Holbrook, took fifteen dollars, and gave that quit-claim. And then they went back miles from nowhere, as Kate insisted, sank from the level of Freeholders to that of Leaseholders on the Finster place, and thus Fremont lost Mary Livermore.

Even in this darkness of perishing in their own prosperity, as Fremont was sure they were, they had not lost all. Nature is a wonderful mathematician, her specialty being multiplication, and when they left Ohio, they would have been delighted to have had as many fowls, hogs, cattle and horses as they took to the Finster place. They removed with not much of what the Scriptures call "stuff," nor with what a patriarch would have called "much cattle," but they had a nice little bunch, and as for the thousand hills, they were open to them, clothed with grass.

And yet Kate always insisted that she was forced to go. Fremont remembers to this day her debate with his father over it, in which his mother took the negative. She had a plan so daring that Alvin could not see how a sane woman could possibly have thought of it. It handicapped him in his argument for that very reason. You who were shocked by having caught her smoking her pipe, will have difficulty in crediting her with it.

"We'll never make no property," she said. "It runs in families, like consumption. We ain't the property kind."

"Your cousin John was rich," said Alvin, "an' they say that my Uncle Bill was worth more'n ten thousand dollars when he died."

"All of 'em I knew," said she, "was as poor as skim-milk in fly-time. We're the same. There's some Holbrook wolf always a-watchin' us, an' always will be, an' soon's our carcass is worth pickin' they'll pull us down."

"The cattle's increasin'," remarked Alvin.

He wondered at her taking of this line, for she was usually the optimist of the family.

"An' what's cattle worth?" she returned. "Now we can make a live of it most anywhere. I vum, I believe you'd do better, if that was all, workin' for somebody else than for yourself. I've heard of a university the state runs in Iowa City. I want to sell everything but a cow or two, an' drive down to Iowa City, an' live where the children can have a chance to be somebody. I might take boarders. They tell me that there's always plenty of scholars that want board, an' I'm a good cook when I have anything more'n fair water to cook with. I favor jest livin' from now on, an' movin' where these children can have what we never got, learnin'."

"W'y, womern!" exclaimed the astounded Alvin, "you must be crazy! I do' know but one way to make a livin'. I'd starve in a big place like Iowa City."

"No you wouldn't," protested Kate. "Folks don't starve in the city any more'n in the country, if they're willing to work. I never heard of city folks havin' to live on bran bread!"

"W'l, what's all this we hear about," said Alvin, stung by the bran-bread allusion, "of folks beggin' their bread on the streets? Hey? Bran bread's better than beggin'."

"Uncle Steve always makes a livin' in town," said Kate, taking known ground. "Come, Alvin, le's live from now on jest f'r these children. What are you an' me?

Nothing but means f'r these little things to git into this hard cruel world! That's all we be. An' they're smart—if they had a chance. Freemie takes to books. No knowin' what he might be if he had something around him besides cattle and hogs and grass and wilderness. Le's go to Iowa City an' jest live for the children, Alvin!"

Does this poor woman's vision give you no thrill? It would, if you only knew the life she had lived, and the revolution it marked in her way of thinking.

Fremont was not for the Iowa City project. He wanted to move in a covered wagon, and was desolated when he found that it was only a few miles over to the Finster place. All the little children that came through Monterey County with the movers seemed like parts of stories he read. He wanted to be one of them. In Fremont's veins was the blood of generations of Way-Finders, calling him to the Open Road. Why do Americans of the old stock so almost universally refuse to settle down? Why are we uneasy as a nation as we find ourselves wading in the Pacific, shading eyes with our cupped hands and gazing at the sunset? Why do we always think that we require a change of climate? Don't ask Fremont McConkey, or me. Ask Captain John Smith and the Pilgrim Fathers and the Rondout Valley Dutch—they began it.

Alvin, the immovable, took Kate, the strong-minded, over to the Finster place. She was only a woman. So they left the lilacs and the trees and the currant-bushes and gooseberry-bushes Kate had set out and tended. They left the peonies and the roses which made Kate's eyes fill with tears when she saw them in bloom. But they moved toward the Bushyagers. And one day, Fremont, out on the range, confronting a boy who seemed to have become almost a man, looked closer, and found himself face to face with the darkling child whom he had taught his lessons in the Second Reader.

CHAPTER VII

THE GREATENING WORLD

THE greatening world of Henry and Fremont was a marvelous thing, a good deal like that of a Greek boy when the universe ended at the Pillars of Hercules on the west and Byzantium on the east. Their Gibralter was the great town of Lithopolis and their Byzantium was Monterey Centre, a still larger metropolis, which now numbered so many people that it was built up on both sides of the street. Their Mediterranean was an ocean of grass, their galleons were their cattle. This sea was bounded all about by settlements, but still it was so large that one could not see from side to side of it. It was mottled with the shadows of clouds in days of thunder-heads and periods of west winds—shadows which moved majestically across the plain, dipping into the hollows and nobly breasting the low hills. It had hillsides which were blue with bird's-foot violets in early spring, and all over it grew the purple and yellow poss-blummies in the very edges of the patches of snow, and later, the enthralling succession of flowers, until the fringed gentian hid itself in the deep grasses of the swales in late October. Fremont and Henry were no Columbuses or Magellans—they ventured out only far enough to give their horned ships their cargoes of forage, skirted the settlements on their way home, cast anchor in the harbor of their corral at night, and were happy and content. For

Fremont this lasted for years. Only a few things happened.

We remember, however, that second summer, when he began noting off to the west at noon another herd. He told his father, who was plainly concerned; for he had thought that the neighbors would respect his priority in this grazing privilege. He had hoped for peace and at least a moderate degree of prosperity.

"Watch 'em close," said he to Fremont, "an' if they begin crowdin' in, we'll have to see what we can do about it."

It did not seem to be a large herd, but Fremont saw it at a distance only as it moved over the top of a hill. Sometimes he did not see it at all for days. Fremont wondered if he was expected to defend the range as Dashing Charlie did in a story in the *New York Weekly*. He looked at himself in disgust, for he was as little like Dashing Charlie as one could be. He had no saddle. He rode on an army blanket folded and fastened on by a strap buckled under the horse's belly. He had no dashing steed; he was mounted on old Doll, whose colt succeeding the yearling of the spring before, was running by her side, and which occasionally retarded a quick cutting-out movement by nuzzling for nutriment. A most uncowboylike thing! He had no revolver. And in place of the pants with the hair on 'em he wore blue denim overalls, fringed at the bottom by wear. He had no spurs, but urged Doll along by kicking her in the sides with his bare heels. So he was completely lacking in that stimulus which apparel and equipment gave to chivalry. I should like to have your judgment as to how Sir Lancelot would have measured up to the requirements of Arthur's court in the garb of Fremont, as Fremont did one day, when his herd was drinking from the waters of Willow Creek, and that other herd headed by a curly-pated, spiky-horned bull, came bellowing down to contest the water-

right; and galloping down to a leap across the brook, on an agile black horse, came a hulking big boy, who bellowed, "What yeh doin' hyur? You mix your cattle up with mine, and I'll skin yer."

This sounded like a call to arms, but the first demand was that of duty. The herds must not be allowed to mingle as their instincts would lead them to do. This, with horned cattle, is owing to the identical instincts which cause people to collect in crowds with no object except to gratify, first, enmities and the desire to fight; second, friendly yearnings and the wish to caress and fondle. You may develop your whole science of sociology, sir, from that sentence and, therefore, I'll make a paragraph of it.

There were two ways to keep the herds from mingling, one to drive the McConkey herd off, and retreat; the other to turn back the strange herd; and this might be regarded as an attack. Fremont did not hesitate. He rode up to the spiky-horned bull, struck him a sounding whack across the nose with a hickory club of which Fremont had been making a Crusader's Sword; and then turned on the other boy with a fine appearance of hardihood, but with a trembling voice, and ordered him off the premises.

"You take your cattle away," said Fremont, advancing, "I have priority here."

Now the other boy had by this time jumped down from his saddle—he had one—and as Fremont made this speech he was plucking Fremont from old Doll's back, with his big hand upraised for a resounding slap on the ear, when this speech on the priorities issued from the lad's white lips.

"Why, dog my cats!" exclaimed his assailant, "ef it hain't little Freem McConkey!"

You see these boys had not seen each other since Fremont was four and Bently nine, in the days when Peter Rice ate fish, alligators caught eels, eels caught alligators and fish ate raw potaters; and Bently's voice was changing.

It was equal to a score of years beginning a decade later, and Fremont was longer in sensing identity.

"Gosh darn!" said he after a pause. "It's Bent!"

Now, the two herds divided the range peacefully, and Fremont's new intimacy with a Bushyager began. One can't choose the intimates of one's son on the prairie; he will go with such boys as are to be found. There were whole days and weeks when their cattle behaved beautifully, stayed away from the fields of corn and wheat, grazing the sweet prairie grass, and lying on the turf chewing their cuds like a people in good times.

Fremont was happy. He had found some one to listen to his stories. His initial attempts in fiction were made here on this open range, in making over the stories which he retold. We have all done it since Homer's time. He liked "Ginevra" from the Fifth Reader; and Bent listened, and then said that when they found the girl in the chist they wan't nothing left to her but a ring, some bones and a hoop-skirt. This spoiled the romance. So Fremont, yielding to his public, as I wish I could do now, told of Robin Hood and Lafitte the pirate and Daniel Boone, Kit Carson and Captain Kidd. He told of Stout Joe Call of Vermont, who accidentally killed the champion wrestler of the British Army in Revolutionary times, by squeezing him too hard in grappling with him—as of course would be the case with a champion American and one who was only a Britisher. He told of Adam Poe's great leap across the deep chasm in Ohio—a leap of some twenty-five feet—when he was cornered by the Indians; and Bent accounted for this feat on well-known natural principles by saying that Adam jist *had* to jump it. And one day when they were joined by two or three of Bently's friends from Lithopolis who treated Fremont slightingly because he was little and green, Bent sat them down in a circle on a hilltop and said: "Freem, tell us stories!" Whereupon Fremont told his best ones. Not

"Ginevra" this time, but one Bently had never heard, about a successful cattle thief in the Highlands of Scotland. Stories of banditry always caught the absorbed attention of Bently. And Fremont had his audience so far under control that when the circle broke up, the cattle were just entering the corn-fields of Buck Gowdy, who owned the north shore of their Mediterranean sea of grass.

They dug wolves and badgers out of their holes. They knew the nests of the sand-hill and whooping cranes, almost as well as did the birds themselves, and they caught and tamed their young, as well as the young of the geese. There is a flock of Canada geese in that neighborhood yet, descended from their captures. The prairie had no secrets from them. Who can see anything wrong in such an idyllic life among birds, flowers, kine and romance, even though Bently's father did give him a new horse to ride and care for rather more frequently than was usual with Iowa settlers?

A terrible thing happened a year or so after this, when Fremont was alone. He was reading *The Lives of the Presidents,* by Mr. J. T. Headley, which had been loaned to him by Uncle Jake Vandemark; and, though I assure you, I would not read this dull book now if I were paid for it, Fremont was so lost in it as he sat on a glacial boulder one afternoon, that his cattle were invisible when at last he closed it on the wonderful career of Millard Fillmore and thought about them. He mounted old Doll and urged her from hill to hill. To lose his cattle was something like an unpardonable sin. They were a sacred trust; but they had proved themselves so far from trustworthy that they had apparently moved toward mischief as soon as Fremont was well immersed in that immortal work which Uncle Jake had said would learn him how poor boys got up into high positions. Where had they found their mischief? He hoped not in the fields of Mr. Buckner Gowdy, who was an aristocrat from Kentucky as some said, and according to others a

scape-grace who had been run out of that state, and was no better than he might be, but was awful strict about folks' cattle breaking into his crops, of which he had thousands and thousands of acres.

Fremont wondered whether old Doll could stand the speed to which he pushed her as he rode on and on, following the trail of the herd, where it had crossed a brook. They were headed toward the Gowdy shore of the Grassy Sea. A new region to Fremont. He knew it only through tales of the chief Hyperborean, Mr. Gowdy, and by the name which it had, just as if it had been a town—the name of Blue Grass Manor.

He caught a glimpse of the herd down a road at the end of which there stood great barns and a big white house with columns along the front. Fremont gasped. It looked just like the picture of the great house in the story, *The Octoroon* which he remembered as having been only half finished when his files of the *Saturday Night* ended. And as he clattered up behind the hurrying cattle, a big negro who was driving them and absolutely refused either to see Fremont or to hear his demands for his cattle, made the picture perfect. He must be one of the slaves. Everybody knew him, as a matter of fact, except recluses like Fremont, as Pinck Johnson, Buck Gowdy's nigger.

The cattle were deftly turned into a barnyard by other men. They stood there, panting and dusty. Fremont tried to undo the gate, but it would not yield. Pinck Johnson showed his treasury of pearls in laughing at Fremont. The boy looked around, picked up an ax, and assaulted the gate, crying spasmodically. Just as a tall man who seemed in charge failed, by an inch, to get his foot split by the ax, a smiling man, just a trifle stooped, six feet high, with a little black mustache curled up like a drake's tail-feathers, came up behind Fremont and spoke to him so kindly that Fremont at once trusted him.

"What's the matter, my boy?" he asked. "Anything I can do to help you?"

"That nigger stole my cattle!" burst forth from Fremont. "I want 'em back! I—I—I—can't git 'em back by milkin' time now! Help me take 'em out o' that yard, please!"

"Just like him to steal 'em," said Mr. Gowdy. "They weren't in anybody's corn—or anything, were they?"

Fremont's head dropped.

"They was jes' mowin' away the corn," said Pinck Johnson.

"I've told you, Pinck," said Gowdy reproachfully, "that when the corn is in the milk as it is now, if the cattle get into it, let them stay there until they founder themselves. If they die, they won't come back. Haven't I told you that?"

"Yes, suh!"

"And now, my young cattle king, tell me how you let them get away."

"I was reading," said Fremont, wiping away his tears and remembering his *ng's*.

"What has that to do with the cattle's getting in the corn?" asked Gowdy.

"I got interested, and forgot to watch 'em," confessed Fremont.

"Is that book there the one you were reading?" asked Gowdy.

"Yes, sir," admitted Fremont.

"Let me see it," said the owner of Blue Grass Manor.

Fremont handed him the book. Gowdy took it, sat down on a wagon-tongue, and leafed it over. Then he looked at the poor little clodhopper, in an agony of anxiety at losing his cattle and having them "taken up" for trespass, his face red with weeping, standing by his old mare with a blanket in lieu of a saddle, his checked hickory shirt dusty

and wet with perspiration, and his ragged denim trousers flapping about his bare feet—and then Gowdy's eyes went back to the pages of Mr. Headley's *Lives of the Presidents.*

"You see," quavered Fremont, "I had to finish it to-day because pa's going to Monterey Centre to-morrow, and I had to send it back. I only had a week to read it in."

"And did you finish it?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" remarked Mr. Gowdy. "I *will* be damned! Pinck, you and one of the men take these cattle back to their range. I am about to ask this gentleman to do me the honor of stepping into the house a moment. May I ask, sir, the favor of your name?"

"John Charles Fremont McConkey," said Fremont.

"I have taken the liberty, Mr. McConkey," said Mr. Gowdy without a smile, "to place at your service some of my men to assist in getting your herd back to their pasture. I wish you would step into the house for a moment."

Fremont protested, and, protesting, went in. At a word from Mr. Gowdy, some one brought him some cold meat and bread and a glass of milk—and then came the vision! He noticed all at once that the walls of the room were covered with books. It was, as sure as there is a God in Heaven, it was a Library! To be sure it wasn't a *very* large room, and there were *some* spaces that were not shelved; but when he went away, which he did after a brief time spent in eating and drinking, and the balance in telling Mr. Gowdy something about his tastes in reading, that library took on powers of extension. He dreamed of spending days and weeks exploring it. And when he indulged, as of course he would, in visions of being adopted by Mr. Gowdy and made his heir, it was the library which just for the dream's sake, reconciled him to the leaving of his family, and becoming the young gentleman at Blue Grass Manor. Even as a dream it was unsatisfactory; for these

democratic pioneers paid no deference to Buckner Gowdy, even; and he could not imagine Uncle Steve Lawless or Uncle Jake Vandemark doffing his hat to Fremont Gowdy the heir of Blue Grass Manor. Then there was no ivied tower, no moat, no ghost, no legend, no ancient anything!

But while the reader is doomed to disappointment, who expects this little boy with the independent spirit, manifesting itself this once in the direction of mayhem with a deadly weapon, to wit: an ax, to be taken up as a protégé by the rich Mr. Gowdy of Blue Grass Manor, this extraordinary encounter had in it something of the fateful. For a most astonishing thing came of it next Christmas. It came to Fremont in the form of a present of thirty-six numbers of *Our Young Folks;* perhaps the best magazine ever enjoyed by the youth of America, and which I believe was afterward, with some other publications, merged into *St. Nicholas.*

It had in it stories and articles by Henry Ward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe and our best writers and thinkers generally. Mayne Reid contributed to some of these thirty-six numbers his wonderful story *Afloat in a Forest,* and in that Fremont found an account of the same man-eating fish that Roosevelt afterward discovered in the River of Doubt. He knew that *Darius Green* was a wonderful creation half a century before they applied the name to Professor Langley. Trowbridge had here, too, that other poem which has been forgotten, *The Wonderful Sack*—forgotten I suppose, because its praise of a cheerful disposition as a cure for poverty has fallen into disrepute; but Fremont enjoyed even while he distrusted it. He never sees in the anthologies the poems of Alice and Phoebe Cary, Lucy Larcom, and Celia Thaxter, but he remembers the thrill he felt when he read these sweet simplicities of song in those old magazines.

There came with them also the *Life of Daniel Boone, Comstock's Natural Philosophy,* a *Botany,* and a *System*

of Double Entry Bookkeeping, which I have named in the order of their interest to him. Even though the latter boasted of "an infallible rule for debtor and creditor," it never enthralled him, and it was rated lowest in point of interest of all that reading matter to which he had access. I regret that the book which ran it a close second for the tail-end of the list was the Bible; for, being of a methodical nature, he always read a book straight through, and after the Children of Israel were safely in the Promised Land, Fremont found *himself* wandering in the Wilderness, in the Plans and Specifications of Solomon's Temple, and the House of the same great king. In these he wandered many years, but he never got through them. They seemed to him sickeningly like the Double Entry Bookkeeping.

All the rest he read to rags. They inspired him. He wondered if he, too, might not be a writer. They inspired him and they depressed him. He felt the urge that made the Ettrick Shepherd and Robert Burns and that wonderful prodigy, known to the world forever, Chatterton. Perhaps these boys were not essentially rarer souls than Fremont McConkey; but they had a truer urge. They sang of what they saw and what they were. Fremont was blighted by a society and a literature which looked backward and elsewhere for its material. He loved Celia Thaxter's *Sandpiper;* but there was no sea nor shore in his prairie life. He had never seen a woodpecker when he read Phoebe Cary's *Legend of the Northland,* nor a brown thrush before he had learned Lucy Larcom's poem of that name. He must go away, when he grew up, he said, so as to find things about which people could write. There was nothing on the prairie or in the prairie people for a writer. This was the result of his feast on the warmed-over English Literature which Americans who should have known better laid before him. The Light of the Prairie bade fair to be darkness for

him, spiritually and intellectually, as it had been for his father economically.

But economically, things were brightening. Something like dawn was broadening on the eastern horizon of the McConkey family. These settlers were growing more prosperous. The Herd Law had given the McConkeys an income outside the revenue from the farm. They actually had a little money. Better than this, land had gone down in price. Out on the prairie, even farther than the farm they had lost, were lands which their non-resident owners had become tired of holding as grazing ground for others, and were willing to sell.

Fremont every day delivered a red cow and a white one to a little girl, who used to come and stand waiting for them on a high place half a mile from her father's house. She was a pretty little girl with brown legs, and a pretty name and hazel eyes. Her name was Dorinda Doughty. She liked flowers. And though neither of them would have had the matter published for all the world, Fremont was in the habit of gathering flowers for her. One day in June he had a great mass of the scarlet prairie lilies, with a center of shooting stars. The thing which drew Dorinda's attention to Fremont's bouquets was the fact that he always had them arranged according to a plan. It was not according to the principles of the Japanese flower-arrangements, but they were not thrown together every which way, as Dorinda had learned from her mother to term confusion. On this occasion, Fremont had alighted from old Doll's back many times to pluck these flowers, and he was very proud of the shooting stars, which were rare.

"Hello, Dorinda," said he.

Dorinda stood digging her toes into the dust, and refused to commit herself.

"Here's some more flowers," said Fremont. "I don't

want 'em. They'll wilt before I can get 'em home. Want 'em?"

"I don't care," replied Dorinda, and reached out her hand. "Them's kind of purty," said she, pointing to the shooting-stars.

This graciousness on Dorinda's part was embarrassing. Fremont had no reply, and they stood looking away from each other for some time. Then Dorinda, flourishing a little whip, shouted "Whay" at her cows, though they were already moving slowly on their proper course to the Doughty farmstead.

"We're goin' to move," said she, turning back.

"Where?" asked Fremont.

"Out on the prairie," said she. "We bought land of Mr. Ashe, at the Centre. He's got more to sell. Dad says tell your father if he wants land, he better go an' see Cap Ashe. We didn't have much money, but dad says that Cap Ashe says that spec'lators says, any money is better'n land now'days—an' we're goin' to move soon's we c'n git a house built."

"Do you know what the scientific name is f'r them lilies?"

Dorinda shook her head. *"Hexandria Monogynia,"* replied Fremont, riding off at a gallop. Both the furious offset of the speed (I suppose "offset" may be used as the antonym of "onset") and the Latin name for the poor innocent red lily, were things which impressed Dorinda deeply. The dear child could not know that Fremont was the only boy in the world then studying the Linnean system of botany, which was even more out of date than the steed. Fremont had analyzed his flower according to the system in the book Buck Gowdy had given him, which was published in 1832. But it benefited Fremont just as much. In matters of education, where the mind may be at any

given time, is of no consequence; the only thing that matters is, which way is it going?

If Kate McConkey had been at home when Alvin started for Monterey Centre to see about the land that John Doughty said was begging for purchasers, Fremont would never have gone, looking the way he did. To a sensitive child, banished from contact save with a few of his kind, condemned to long lonely days with the green sky of the prairies and the blue meadows of heaven, full of romance, quivering with dreams, timid as a shade-haunting heron, yet yearning for companionship, conscious of his own precocity, secretly proud of it, and yet keenly aware that he must be looked upon by town people as an ignorant clod, there was something eventful in the mere contemplation of going to town; there was the secret dread, the inward horror which Cato felt at falling into naught. It was a "pleasing, dreadful thought." And how could Fremont's mother expect him to think much of his clothes, especially in view of the fact that the suit he wore was not perceptibly worse than his other one? He went to Monterey Centre, and to the office of Captain Fillmore Ashe in the clothes he wore to Blue Grass Manor, except that he did put on shoes,—and regretted it all the time.

"W'y, yes," was Captain Ashe's hearty greeting, "I know you. Shot prairie chickens out by your place last summer. Name's—le's see—name's McDonald——"

"McConkey," said Alvin, as Fremont slyly opened a book lying on a desk.

"Certainly," said Mr. Ashe. "I meant McConkey. Used to live over on Section Twenty-two. Sold it——"

"Lost it," said Alvin. "Holbrook took it away from me."

"Been runnin' a herd out northeast of Lithopolis," went on Captain Ashe. "Yes, yes! You're the man that John

Doughty said might want to buy. Say, Mr. McConkey, I've been saving out a half-section for you. Just the thing for you. Got any boys growin' up? Three! Say, that's fine! Why, you really ought to have a section—a quarter for each of the young ones when they marry, an' one for the old folks. An' I've been savin' the very section you want!"

Captain Ashe spoke as if he had kept these lands from floating away by means of grappling hooks. Alvin shook his head.

"I thought," said he, "if I could find a forty that I could pay for——"

"No!" said the captain, holding up his hands in solemn warning—and it *was* a solemn thing to see his commission dwarfed to that paid on the price of forty acres. "No! Mac, that ain't the Iowa style. That is Ohio and New York, but it ain't Iowa. Things are bigger out here. I'll tell you what I'll do with you. I'll compromise on a half-section. And I'll tell you right where it is. You know it as well as you know the way to your mouth. It's the south half of Section Twenty-one, right cornering with that land you sold to Holbrook."

"Yes," said Alvin, "I know that piece. Good land, too. How much do you want for it? Or for, say, eighty acres of it?"

Captain Ashe wanted all he could get; but he finally said that if Alvin took it right away, he might have it for sixteen hundred dollars, and he'd let half of it stand on mortgage. Alvin said he only had seven hundred and twenty dollars, and he was afraid of a mortgage. It was a mortgage that lost him his other farm. Twenty-four per cent. interest was too much.

"Robbery! Plain robbery!" exclaimed Captain Ashe. "I'll make the interest so you won't feel it—ten per cent. Now what do you say?"

He finally said he would take the half-section if Ashe

would let nine hundred dollars stand on mortgage at the unprecedentedly low rate of ten per cent.; but he would have to hurry back home and come in to make out the papers some other day. But this did not suit Captain Ashe. He asked if Alvin would be satisfied if N. V. Creede looked over the title and pronounced it good. Alvin had not thought about the title, but assented to Mr. Creede's investigation.

Captain Ashe wanted to make this sale—and he was naturally a hospitable man.

"Now, it's dinner time," said he, "half past twelve, by gravy! And I want to talk to you about this thing. I'll tell you what we'll do. You go up to my house for dinner, and we can talk things over while N. V. looks over the title, and we eat."

Alvin demurred. The captain insisted. He was afraid that Henderson L. Burns would sell Alvin something if he could once get him away from Mr. Ashe; and then his holding this land against all the efforts of the forces of nature to sweep it out of the market would be lost, and with it a sadly-needed commission. Captain Ashe won, and presently, Mrs. Ashe saw the trio coming down the road without pavement or sidewalk which was called the street, and gasped to her eldest daughter, "There, your father's bringing more buyers home for dinner! I never did see his like—go out and slice up some more potatoes for frying, Cathie, and boil three more eggs, and I'll be out in a minute, and tell your father that dinner will be a little late. Did you ever see such a sight as that little white-headed boy?"

Alvin ate as he always did, with his knife; and he drank tea from his saucer, just as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington did in their day. In fact, it was an instance of the table manners of Washington's and Grant's times meeting at the same table. For the earlier generation had

no forks with which the important task of prehension could be performed. You couldn't do it yourself, madam, as you will at once admit when I remind you, if you are as old as I am, and inform you if you are as young as you look, that that earlier generation used steel forks with but two sharp tines, much less useful in carrying food than chopsticks, which may be adjusted to the task. So our coarse and boorish ancestors, with all their ruffles, laces and rapiers at side, put their food in their mouths with their knives, as Alvin did.

The great moral question involved seems never to have occurred to them!

But Fremont had a theoretical knowledge, gleaned from the story papers, that Mrs. Ashe, you will remember, had sent him, which advised him that he must not eat with his knife or drink from his saucer. He could not keep from blushing at his father's manners; but what is one blush more atop of all those which mantled his tanned cheeks at the presence of the three little girls—Cathie, about his age, Winifred two years younger, and May—but May did not count at this time, for she was a lisper of five or so. Fremont's theoretical knowledge of courtly manners gave him no confidence except as to what not to do; therefore, he did not voluntarily eat at all, nor speak. When urged to partake by Mrs. Ashe he took scalding tea from the cup, and ate a slice of bread, which lying outside the scope of the romances, he buttered in a manner that would have pleased a mason, and bit in nice semicircular bites; the which May at once imitated, and was reproved by Cathie for some other enormity, but in such a way that May knew she must not bite out horseshoes in that manner, nor let the boy know she was reproved for it.

The dinner dragged along at some length; for Captain Ashe was so good a sport as to want Mr. Creede to have all the time possible for the five-minutes' work of examin-

ing the title, so that he might have a chance at this old tiller of the soil with something like a fee. In search of new matter of entertainment, Mrs. Ashe turned to the boy.

"I suppose," said she, "that you are glad you are to have a farm of your own to live on."

"Yes, mom," replied Fremont, "but I hate to leave the prairie."

"Why," queried Mrs. Ashe, "isn't your new home going to be on the prairie?"

"He means," said Alvin, "the prairie where we run our herd. He does our herdin'."

"So," said Mrs. Ashe, "we have with us a little shepherd boy."

"No, mom," said Fremont, after a long pause, during which he had been thinking of this. "I think it would be more nearly proper to say that I am a neatherd."

"A what?" said the lady, surprised at this decidedly literary expression, with which, it must be confessed, she was not familiar.

"What y' mean by that word, Fremont?" asked his father.

"A shepherd," said Fremont, "is one who cares for sheep. A person who herds cattle is a neatherd."

"Shucks!" said Alvin, "that's some fool word he's got out of his readin'. He's always talkin' things nobody understands."

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Ashe. "Neatherd, is it? I must look that up in the dictionary. Say, Fillmore, I believe this is the child I sent the story papers to."

"Yes, mom," said Fremont, "I'm much obliged for them. I liked them. And ma read them, too, just to see how the stories came out, you know. Ma taught herself how to read, but I learned of Mary Livermore. I hope she will be my teacher when we get back to the old neighborhood. I'll be glad to be near the school again."

So Alvin went back home with a deed to his half-section, leaving a mortgage on it behind, and the Ashe family talked for days about the little clodhopper who called himself a "neatherd" and who explained to Winifred when she flipped a card from under a penny on the tip of her finger, leaving the penny in place, that this was owing to the "inertia" of the penny.

"He's funny," said Winifred, "but he *looks* so! And his clothes are dirty."

"Yours would be dirty, too," said Cathie, "if you had worked to earn money to buy a farm with. He'd be better-looking than any boy I know, if he had better clothes."

"Hith thkin," lisped little May, "is des as white! I thaw it thoo a hole in hith panth. He ain't got any gawies on."

"There!" said Cathie indignantly. "You've got even the baby makin' fun of a boy that's got more to be proud of than any of us—and he knows more, too!"

"Tee hee!" jeered Winifred. "Cathie's got a new beau!"

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I

WHICH THE YOUNG WILL SCARCELY BELIEVE

IF EVER a boy was at the same time in ecstatic bliss and infernal torment, it was Fremont McConkey one day late in June in 1874—when, as the reader will note, he was just a few days more than seventeen years old. What is so rare as a day in June? If Fremont had known the quotation, he would alternately have objurgated Mr. Lowell, and thanked him for a beautiful thought.

A man of his age would, of course, have been in love on many and many a special occasion, but now, for the first time in all his seventeen long years, the tide of passion had swelled so high that at last some overt act on his part seemed quite imperative. It was doubtless the accumulation of the waters above the dam—pure gravity, plus a spiritual watershed. The waters were instinct, I suppose; a current of impulses which began with Adam, or in the primordial slime, I am not saying which. My point is, that it was as elemental as thirst. But to Fremont, how glorious it was!

He felt that his time had come; and a boy still in the possession of his modesty confronts this crisis with more trepidation, more of rending and tearing, than the girl who plays opposite is likely to feel under analogous circumstances, for she is (or should be) the passive agent, while he is driven by all the forces of those piled-up waters behind the dam, to *do* something.

There is an immense difference, sisters. Always before Fremont had kept his secret from all the world, especially from the objects of his passion. He had framed many fervid and moving declarations of love, modeled, with improvements, on passages from the works of Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, "The Duchess" and other love specialists, whose writings could be borrowed and read; and he had composed some wonderful new forms whose literary perfections had brought tears to his own eyes.

He had lived through years of varied experiences in a single night, extending from the first timid hand-clasp to the blissful or tragic, near or remote end of a life of bliss or torture with the maiden of his choice. These colorful romances had been shared with him (if there is the slightest basis for any belief in thought-transference) by two elderly spinsters, at least four girls he had seen at spelling schools in neighboring districts, by a Circassian lady in the only circus he had ever seen, and several others. To none of them had he addressed a single word save to the Circassian beauty of whom he had asked the price of her photograph. She stooped from the throne which she occupied in a spirit of great anatomical liberty, and deigned to accept his twenty-five cents with a memorable smile and a bow of her head, which was crowned with a shock of hair at least a foot high, worn in the accepted mode of Circassia. This was the only one of these affairs which was unworthy of a pure mind. He was not altogether proud of it.

To the girls at the spelling schools he had appealed by brilliantly spelling everybody down, except in one case, in which he had purposely missed "Hallelujah" as a tribute to the dear one who was opposed to him—and blushed because people seemed to suspect. There were four girls, because there were four spelling schools—one for each of these titanic contests. The genius, like the sailor, must have his girl in every port. Then there was the wife of the village doctor, who had opened to him a fairy-land, a new heaven and a new earth, by lending him *David Copperfield*—but why further violate these penetralia? Let me but add in the interests of justice and morality, that the poor husband always died painlessly, the victim of some mysterious malady beyond the skill of the profession, before Mr. McConkey allowed even so much as a glance of the eye or a pressure of the hand to suggest the fact of his enslavement. His invariable practise was to suffer and grow strong.

None of these charmers ever dreamed of anything, and as for the outer world, how could it even suspect these tornadoes of love which raged in its midst, like those storms which the Weather Bureau detects by means of instruments, and calls "electric storms," and which we have been passing through without knowing it ever since we lost our prehensible tails? The great world had no instruments with which to catch Fremont McConkey; and let us hope that genius will never in the future render it possible for curiosity to peer into the perturbations of such as he. It would have made a changeling of Fremont, for he lived all these many-hued romances among folks who never dreamed that Fremont McConkey had the sprawl even to think of a girl, to say nothing of making up to one. But he was always thinking of them. Or rather, he was constantly making some damsel a lay-figure over which he draped the garments of romance and into which he breathed

his own living soul. How surprised these maidens and matrons would have been to know what divine creatures they were! And, we shall see, perhaps, how long it may take the creator of such an angel to sense the absence of the wings.

On this hot June day, Admiral Nelson was in command, and according to his victorious habit, he had his flag flying for closer action. Something, Fremont felt, would have to be done to end this purely psychical love-making. He must do something about Dorinda Doughty. He must ask her to "go with him." Go where? Ah, you do not understand! To "go with" a boy in Monterey County, Iowa, in 1874, was to keep company with him. Anywhere would do. . . . If Fremont could only just have asked her to walk home with him from the Dunkard meeting at the schoolhouse on Sunday, or, on some winter's evening, to sit in the bob-sleigh with him on the way to the "literary," why, if he could have asked her anything special, with results of a public nature, the first frowning barriers would have been overpassed; the die would have been cast; the Rubicon crossed, and Rome would have been free no more! If!

All through the spring term of the school which he had taught in the Vandemark Schoolhouse, he as an honorable man, trained in the canons of *noblesse oblige,* which he pronounced "oblyge" (and which he had learned rather by an innate sense of the proprieties than from Mary J. Holmes and her fellows from whom he got the words), had been restrained as by steel bonds from asking Dorinda to go with him. Besides, he would not have liked Uncle Jake Vandemark, the school-director, to find out that he was courting one of the big girls in the school. Uncle Jake would have said that boys could be found to do that for less than twenty-five dollars a month.

Besides again, he had never done such a thing; and

besides once more, Dorinda had never had such a thing done to her. The nearest approach to it had been those occasions over on the herding-grounds when Fremont had brought her those prettily-arranged bouquets, and suggested to her that he didn't want them, and didn't she?

She had sat in the drab school-room, away back in the rear because she was now a big girl and could be trusted not to whisper, and seventy times seven times each day, during the last week, anyhow, Fremont's blue eyes, sweeping his school-room, as a teacher's eye should do, had met Dorinda Doughty's hazel disturbers of the soul for the fraction of a split second, and then the blue ones had returned to their authoritative reconnaissance of the school, while the hazel orbs had dropped to the pages of *McNally's Geography,* or *Ray's Arithmetic,* or *Pinneo's Grammar,* the page swimming a little because of certain rushes of blood to the head, causing flushed cheeks and unsteady handwriting.

They might as well have been separated by interstellar space!

I declare I despair of making you young folks at the end of the century believe this history, for it seems to me that you have all forgotten, you Dorindas and Fremonts of the 'nineties, what the bloom is to the peach, or that before a peach is picked and rubbed on the sleeve of the world it naturally has any bloom. But I know my tale to be true, and if I take the notion, I may tell you sometime how I know. Take it from me, as you are fond of saying in these days, among the children of the pioneers who settled this county, there was long ago such a thing as innocence.

I repeat, they might as well have been separated by interstellar space; for how could an honorable gentleman, even though he did bear on his boots evidences in the form of milk-spatters that he "pailed" his father's cows night and morning, speak to a lovely damsel among his pupils

about—you know what? Even though they were of about the same age, he stood to her in the relation of teacher to pupil—that is *in loco parentis.* And Great Cæsar's Ghost, how afraid of her he was! But the next day, yes, four o'clock this afternoon, would mark the end of his artificial parenthood, for this was the last day of school. And then——.

There is Virginia Thorkelson now, and her sister Hilda speaking their dialogue. They are loving little sisters, but their embarrassment gives to their utterance tones like those of bitter hate, as they hiss through their clenched teeth—or Hilda does:

> "Make me a crown of autumn leaves,
> Braid me a wreath without a thorn;
> For this is the time of fruit and sheaves:
> And this is the day I was born!"

And there is Christian Linderman following with "The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck" and Royal Vandemark with "Meddlesome Mattie," now wisely eliminated from the school reader because it is so against public policy to have a grandmama depicted as addicted to snuff. And now comes the finale with the formidable Dorinda Doughty spelling them all down as usual.

"Ah!" said Fremont to himself, "she and I stand together alone on a lofty pinnacle of our own in this world! This afternoon after school I shall no longer, thank God, stand *in loco parentis* toward her. When we reach the Doughty lane I shall give her the nicest last-day-of-school present in the lot. And then, I shall ask her to go with me to the Grange Picnic and Fourth of July celebration at Crabapple Grove next week. To-morrow I shall draw my seventy-five dollars for my three months of teaching, and spend Sunday and every day until the Fourth thinking of

the future. And then, I shall take the buggy I have borrowed, and after braiding red, white and blue in the manes and tails of Tom and Nettie, I shall drive them wading to their bridles through seas of bliss and embarrassment to Crabapple Grove and the celebration—with Dorinda!"

That last hour of school, how swiftly it dragged, and after a fleeting century or so, Fremont finds himself at the gate opening into the lane that led up to the Doughty farmhouse, standing back from the public road, in true Doughty fashion, in its acre or so of shady, soft-maple grove. His eyes swim as Dorinda goes floating off up this lane after a low "Good-by" breathed forth with averted face and downcast eye.

They always know!

Fremont allows her to pass on unasked for a rod or so, and then calls after her, holding out to her a book or paper. At the second call she hears; the first he himself could not hear. He drags himself, or is dragged by whatever it is in the way of god or goddess in such circumstances who drags a poor boy, out of the earshot of the other children, who stroll on in silence, a little conscious of something in the way of an overcharge in the atmosphere. He hands her the paper, asking loudly if it isn't hers—and then he stammers:

"Dorrie—I—are you going—I'm going to Crabapple Grove to—won't you go—go to the Fourth with me?"

This disjointed feebleness at such a crisis, from Sir Fremont!

Dorinda looks swiftly into his eyes, looks away, looks down, wrings her hands, and blushes scarlet. She knew he was going to ask her. She is surprised that he has done it. Nobody ever asked her before. There is a law laid down by her miserly father, John Doughty, that the Doughty girls and boys shall not go with any one. It tends to interfere with their work, and to lead to marriage and the end of

their work for John Doughty. She knows of this law. She yearns to break it and go. She shrinks from going. It is a crisis. It is conflict. It is delight. She shrinks from going. She shrinks from not going. She is, if one may use the term in dealing with so tragic a situation, all of a twitter.

"Wouldn't you like to go?" asks Fremont, finally.

"I—I," she stammers, burning up with blushes, "yes!—We're awful busy now! We never go anywhere—with any one!"

And on looking up a second after this utterance, he found himself standing there in the narrow lane alone. Dorinda had flown toward the house; and without looking back she flounced her best skirt about the far corner of the dwelling and disappeared.

Fremont felt palpitatingly relieved. He had done it. Like any thoughtful statesman who has crossed the Rubicon, he was somewhat disquieted in his mind as to what he should do with his Rome; but he had crossed the darned stream at last. He had asked a girl to go with him. A line recurred to him from the Fifth Reader:

"And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels the soul within
him climb,
To the awful verge of Manhood!"

And she had accepted him as her escort——
But had she?

CHAPTER II

FLOODS AND STREAMS

THIS break in the narrative represents Fremont McConkey's seating himself on a glacial boulder down in a hollow where he was out of sight to canvass this matter of whether or not Dorinda had really promised to go with him to the Fourth. She had said yes when he had asked her if she wouldn't like to go, and yes was yes, but she had then qualified her assent. Had she assented? Well, she had certainly not said "no"—of course she meant "yes."

Fremont lived four miles from the Vandemark Schoolhouse, and walked back and forth morning and evening. He had let out school early, but this sitting on the boulder had consumed time, and he was late home. He found that his father had fed the stock, which was Fremont's chore. He was home just in time to sit down to supper with the family, but he had small appetite for it.

"Ain't you well, Freemie?" asked his mother. "You're sweatin' like a butcher."

"It's hot!" was his answer.

"You'd 'a' thought it was hot," said his elder brother Henry, "if you'd 'a' been with me pitchin' that slew hay this afternoon."

To this Fremont had no reply to make. It was assumed on Henry's part that Fremont was doing less than his share of the hard work, and Fremont himself felt a little guilty

on the point, for life in the McConkey family was reckoned on a system which used muscular exertion of a useful nature as the standard of value. Fremont himself looked upon his teaching as a sybaritic indulgence, to which he was seduced by his love for reading and study. The fact that he turned over to his father all he earned as a teacher except what he spent for such things as clothes, was looked upon in Iowa then as nothing more than his duty. There was no question in Fremont's mind as to his obligation in the matter. His earnings were his father's, and had always been required for the uses of a family notoriously unfortunate in the matter of "fits of sickness" and a huge mortgage of nine hundred dollars. Alvin McConkey was reconciled to Fremont's easy life during the school year, by the income he derived from it, but between the two older sons it caused some not-ill-natured friction, in which Henry had the advantage. It compensated Henry for the fact that in school he had fallen so very far below his brother.

"Freem," said his sister Abbie, a stalwart girl of upward of twenty, "you act sick. You're sick or in love."

Fremont blushed at this shot in the center of the target.

"You judge others by yourself, Ab," he retorted.

Abbie tossed her head. That she was going to be married one of these days was a matter of strong suspicion, but as was usual in the families of the pioneers, it was supposed to be a profound secret.

"Well," she replied, "I don't let it take my appetite, anyhow, Freem. Who is my future sister-in-law? One of the big girls over in the Vandemark District?"

"Goin' to take her to the Fourth?" piped up his young brother Frank. "Uncle Steve says you're goin' to have the buggy."

Fremont often wished that his mother would not use such expressions as the one with which she had opened the conversation. If she could only talk more like the ladies

he read about. He had snapped her off rather short just now because of the feeling that she was a little vulgar, but he was sorry for it, as she began steering the conversation off into the region of the Grange Picnic, and the real reason why they should all do something in memory of the day we celebrate. She even broke into a bit of an old song, which ran:

"The British yoke, the Gallic chain
They urged upon our necks in vain!
The haughty tyrant we disdain,
And shout 'Long live America.'"

And Fremont in the midst of his tribulation thought what a nice voice his mother had, and how blue her eyes were, and how he wished he could see her dressed as she should be, and not obliged to struggle with work and flies and drudgery; and at the same time he wondered just what that word "Gallic" meant in the song, and whether the man who wrote it knew, and the critic in him came uppermost as he thought that it was too bad we should in singing our exultation at our independence of things British and "Gallic" have to do it in a song which was in words a palpable imitation of *Scots Wha Hae* and sung to the same music. But anyhow ma had turned the talk away from the embarrassing channel in which it was running, and as was her wont shifted it above the things of every-day sordidness. That was ma! After all, it was not vulgar to refer to his sweating, for in the reader was a piece by Shakespeare which Fremont liked very much, in which Hamlet deplores the necessity of grunting and sweating under a weary life. His good mother had spared him any reference to grunting, anyhow, though some of his sighs might almost have elicited the Shakespearean word. And she had not saved him after all, for finally Henry remarked that this buggy deal looked suspicious to him.

"What's the idee," he inquired; "if you won't take a girl, what's the buggy for, Freem?"

"To save walking," said Fremont. "And then I might stumble on a girl anywhere along the road that wanted to go. The knights of old went out to succor the distressed and I don't know of any distress worse than a poor girl suffers on a hot Fourth of July having to walk to the celebration. So I'm goin' to be a knight and go forth with a team and buggy instead of in the saddle with lance in rest!"

A slow grin overspread Henry's face as this rhapsody fell from Fremont's lips. He knew from experience that there was no longer any chance to get his brother to talk sense. He had got up on his high horse.

"Gosh!" said Henry, "I thought for a single minute that he meant it. Well, Freem, before you start out, you better let the cat lick your face, or take a real shave. Who ever heard of a hero that never shaved?"

"David's face," said Mrs. McConkey, "when he went up against Saul was ruddy and I s'pose looked like Freem's."

"I'll bet Saul was scared," said Henry.

"I guess Dorinda Doughty'd like to see Freem if he was shaved," remarked his little sister Sarah.

If a boy sitting in a hard-backed chair and eating suet pudding can reel, Fremont reeled. But he handled the matter with the diplomacy of desperation, descanting on Saul's feelings about David, and ignoring Sarah, while he wondered how this idea ever entered her mischievous mind. The danger passed. Fremont took up a book and slate and pretended to be extremely busy. Then he took a clean glass and went out to the well and pumped loudly; these things by way of avoiding conversation and advertising the ordinary in his behavior. Then he slipped out into the young trees of the grove he had helped to set out when

they had moved to the new place, and sat on the ground with his back to the greenish-white bole of a sturdy young cottonwood, and lay perdue. He thought of it as lying perdue—which is rather strange in this clod of a country boy and as he lay looking up at the stars, he decided again that Dorinda Doughty had promised to go with him. Sometimes he almost wished she hadn't. It's the way with so many men. The month before the wedding is like the instant before the high dive.

Fremont had a whole week before his high dive; for the Fourth in 1874 fell on a Saturday. It was a time of intensive corn-plowing. The wheat spread over the rolling prairie in great golden-green squares and oblongs, ribbed with moving mottlings of shade as it bowed to the breeze.

"A light wind blew from the gates of the sun,
And waves of shadow went over the wheat."

Fremont thrilled as these lines came to his mind, and the tears came into his eyes. He thought them wonderful lines, and he moved his lips as he repeated the whole poem while he watched the brown earth roll up to the very stems of the maize plants, covering every weed. The consciousness that he was doing good work while enjoying beautiful poetry under those sweet skies filled him with a feeling like that induced by pathos. The corn, which in order to be safe from frost must be knee high by the Fourth, bent under the axle of his plow, and gave forth, as he moved along the emerald rows, a mysterious rustling. The work took no care on his part. He guided the four gleaming shovels without a thought of what he was doing, but as he worked he thought of Dorinda. The sweat wet his hickory shirt, and the dust begrimed it and stuck to his arms and legs in that dark muck which is as far from pollution as the pomades and powders of the exquisite.

Oh, if he could only write a thing like that poem! How he would sing of Dorinda!

"The wild hawk stood with the down on his beak,
And stared with his foot on the prey!"

Those lines about the hawk—they thrilled him most, but as he looked across his rustling maize-field to the wheat on its miles of rolling prairie, he thought how divinely simple are the words, "And waves of shadow went over the wheat"—and back of all were the hazel eyes of Dorinda, and the fact that on the next Saturday for him would begin the wonderful experience of having a girl.

You, my dear Spig, which is, I believe, the name you bear at Ames, or you, my dearest Dorothy, which is a cognomen that in 1874 would have brought upon you as much ridicule in Iowa as Keziah would do now, must use what little imagination your text-books and courses of reading have left you, if you are to understand the situation I am trying to depict. Remember that we are dealing with a near relative of yours in Iowa's era of simplicity, to use a term no more derogatory. If you, Spig, were dated up to meet your girl at Spirit Lake, or if you, Dorothy, were playing opposite some boy in the same sketch with, say Gertrude Vandemark sitting on the veranda transcribing notes, while you were out on the water pretending to fish, or in bathing, and all the world looking on, you would feel no embarrassment at all. But Fremont was in tortures of delight and doubt—and as for Dorinda, I have it on the very best authority that she suffered the tortures of the damned—in any save Alvin McConkey's most orthodox of hells. I do not expect that any except Anglo-Saxon readers will understand this, and of those only such as remember that these were very primitive people, who have lived solitary forest lives for generations. Almost all other peoples

advertise love and publish courtship. People who have since Neolithic times lived in villages never regard the divine passion as a bird does her nest. I commend the thought to anthropologists. My present point is that it freed Fremont from suspicion. Such was the supposed aversion to girls of this boy who had a poet's heart, that they believed his casual hints which led McConkey opinion to the faith that he was going to the Fourth with Bill Blake, who lived over north of Vandemark's Folly Slew.

"If I couldn't find anybody to go with that amounts to something," said Henry, "I'd stay at home 'r go alone, by thunder."

"Why are you eternally runnin' around with that Bill Blake?" queried Abbie.

"A fellow that won't work," added Henry, "but will crawl a mile on his belly to miss a duck 'r goose, and plays sick in stackin' time, but always gets well by four o'clock, and then traipses around in the stubble after prairie chickens."

"You do spend lots of time with Bill in the huntin' season," said his mother.

"I guess he won't injure me," said Fremont. "I have more fun huntin' with him than any one else. He doesn't quit the minute the weather gets bad, or the game scarce. I like him. I don't care if he is worthless. He's a good boy to hunt with."

"He'll quit at the drop of the hat in hayin'," said Henry.

"Well," said Fremont, "that don't spoil any hay for me. I don't like people because they lead exemplary lives. I like 'em because I like 'em. Bill and I think alike on the hunt question. I'll own he ain't an intellectual leader, and never'll set the river afire with work, but if I want to go with him to the Fourth, I'm going. I might object to your escort, Ab, but I don't say so."

There was no Bill Blake for Dorinda's protection. Poor

Dorinda! If she went with Fremont it meant for her what a flood in the Yazoo Valley means to the planters—that the levees were breached and the waters out over the plantation. The Doughty levees were that family taboo against the young people's "keeping company." Her miser father would see in it not only the taking of her mind from her work, late risings Monday mornings after sitting up with her fellow, but an objectionable precedent to her brothers, who would have to go for themselves if they should ever marry. Other waters might be outside their banks, too, for "passions are likened best to floods and streams." Dorinda, who knew of Sir Walter Raleigh, not as the author of that line, but as a man who spent two hundred thousand dollars trying to found a colony in Virginia, felt this trait in passions; and just feeling it induced thrills, palpitations, flushings, blushes, pallor, and a dread which she longed to have increased and overcome. It was Miranda and Ferdinand, with Ariel and the nymphs and spirits, Caliban and Prospero transformed into brothers, sisters, parents and neighbors with gibes, jeers, prohibitions and injunctions, added to that bashfulness which once dispelled by experience is gone forever, and which looks so much more sempiternal than it is.

CHAPTER III

THE LEVEE HOLDS

AS FREMONT drove up the lane, Dorinda showed herself in her worst calico dress as she carried to the little new-hatched chickens a plate of cottage cheese and the yolks of eggs. Fremont's pulses stopped—and suddenly went on with an extra systole or two. That kitchen apron, that sunbonnet, that dress which not even a lover would call clean; ominous! And he had seen her on an average of once every minute night and day since a week ago Friday evening, sitting on her father's front stoop in her best dress awaiting his coming!

And who is this leaning on the corner post of the yard so idly? Not her father, no, there he is out in the feed-yard looking at his fatting steers, for which he is so famous. No, it is Marshall Doughty, Dorinda's elder brother, absorbed, apparently, in picking his teeth with a splinter from the fence-post. Some relief, that; for Marshall was a good friend of Fremont's and had done the wonderful thing for him of giving him a book of Tennyson's Poems, in which was found *The Poet's Song* that had sung itself in the boy's heart as he plowed corn. Was it the old Franklin Square edition in paper covers, which that blessed pirate of the publishing world, the Iowa boy, John B. Alden, had forced the Harpers to bring out? Fremont does not remember. Perhaps 1874 is a little too early for Alden's era of cheap classics.

Anyhow, Marshall had given the volume to Fremont with the remark that he, himself, couldn't get anything out of it; but Fremont had got exaltation and insomnia. The Laureate in all probability never made a deeper impression on any personality than on this thirsty soul out on the Iowa prairies who had never before seen a book of poems. I feel sure that he would not on this bright Fourth of July morning, have been driving up the Doughty lane in all this style and misery, had it not been for *Maud* and *The Princess* and *The Idylls of the King* and all the exquisite rest of them. A little poetry is a dangerous thing, and to a person with the artistic flair, leading a hungry and solitary soul-life at seventeen, large doses are fatal to spiritual poise. But it did not impair Fremont's horsemanship, for he brought his team up standing before the gate, with the wheels cramped beautifully, like a pair of opened arms, for Dorinda's convenience in getting in.

"Hello," said Marshall, dropping his splinter. "Goin' to the Fourth?"

There was now a long pause during which Marshall carefully took the horses' manes from under their collars. Fremont forced himself to believe that Dorinda was getting into her holiday clothes. Even in the shadow of impending tragedy he let his mind dwell for a moment on this process, and blushed. Marshall put his foot on the hub and cleared his throat.

"I guess we won't any of us go," said he, with much the same tone as that usually adopted in asking who will preach the funeral sermon, "we're away behind with the corn-plowin' and the weeds are growin' awful. Pa says one day right now is worth three next week. Ma is bakin', an'—an' Dorinda's got her clothes to soak and won't be through before late this afternoon. We may git in to see the fireworks to-night, if pa don't think the horses is too tired——"

"Get up!"

It did not sound like the cry of a lost soul in torment, but it had its resemblances. It came from Fremont's lips as his whip stung the flank of the blameless horse which stood handiest to the weapon, and before Marshall had time to finish his verdict of murder in the first degree in the case of the "State of Misery vs. Fremont McConkey" the equipage was far down toward the main road.

It was at about this time Fremont afterward told himself—but nobody else, you may be assured—that the iron entered into his soul. In those several bales of literary weeklies which he had read, it was the practise for the iron to enter the hero or heroine's soul at times of great crises. It had been so with "Carlos the Terrible," of whom Fremont had read only the other day, who from a bullfighter had turned bandit after the iron had entered into his soul because a great Don Somethingorother, who was what Fremont pronounced a High Dalgo, had made free with his sweetheart. After this iron transaction, Carlos became "The Terrible," operating on an extensive scale in exterminating his enemies, with banditry as a side-line. It was no doubt the boring of the iron which caused Fremont to think of Carlos as he turned into the main road, occasionally putting his hand on the leather cushion beside him to make sure that it was as pathetically empty as he knew it was. Alexander the Great once crucified a doctor, sheared all the Macedonian horses and mules, razed the battlements of many cities, prohibited music and sacrificed a lot of peasants to show his grief which was not as keen as Fremont's now, because it was unmixed with humiliation. But he was Alexander, and Fremont was a poor thing, a clodhopper, but mine own. So all he could do in the way of revolt was to think of "Carlos the Terrible" and wonder what the outlook might be in Iowa for an industrious young bandit. For the seat continued pathetically empty.

Over the horses' heads the horizon swam in tears. Where to now? The original purpose to go to Crabapple Grove controlled the movement for perhaps half a mile, after which the lack of purpose kept Fremont going in the same direction for another, as any one wise in the ways of purposeless men and drifting nations might have predicted. It is the influence of what kept the little Ashe girl's penny on her finger-tip—inertia, as Fremont, you will remember, explained. But always something goes wrong with the harness, or the army, or the navy, or the crown, which forces some change. It did so in Fremont's case. A tug came unhooked. Fremont got out and hooked it, and then climbed in. He was in a hollow where none could see. The blue-joint grass, growing tall by the roadside, was quite within the reach of the horses, in spite of their check-reins, so making those gestures of disdain whereby they loosen the gear that hinders their eating, they began cropping the blue-joint, wondering whether this was not too good to last. Fremont, in the buggy, scarcely heard the dick-cissel singing on the tip of a tall gum-weed a few rods off, or the bobolinks giving their last of the summer recitals among the kinnikinics in the near-by slew. He was wading in deep waters, a crushed and broken man, the wreck of what he had been at eight o'clock. He could never hold up his head again. The revolutionary act of going with a girl for the first time had consequences hard enough to bear, but to have got the mitten was intolerable, and in this way! To be sent away from her door in all the red-white-and-blue bravery braided into his horses' manes and tails!

He wondered what the horses would do if he left them by the roadside and ran away. If there had been any fences he would have tied them and fled, but a team is a great responsibility in the life of a farmer boy, and he simply couldn't turn them loose to tear Uncle Steve's buggy all to bits.

Thoughts like these are what made him look so strange to Catherine Ashe as her father, Captain Fillmore Ashe, drove up beside Fremont's team and stopped. The captain was mentally busy with an ailing horse, one of the pair hitched to his two-seated covered carriage, and as for his younger daughters, May and Winifred, they were too much engaged in scanning the prairie for the bright scarlet prairie lilies to notice the farm buggy and team standing in the tall grass by the roadside in the hollow, or the pale and odd-behaving boy sitting with his feet over one side of the buggy as if in the act of springing out for flight. The third loud "Whoa!" by which Captain Ashe announced their presence brought Fremont out of his trance with a start. Catherine thought for a moment that he looked as if he had been weeping.

"I've got a sick horse here," said the captain. "Know anything about horses? I don't, but he don't look much like gettin' us to the doin's at the Grove, does he?"

"No," said Fremont, after noting the sweat dripping from the horse's belly, and observing his dumb manifestations of distress. "No, he doesn't. I know very little of horse ailments, but my father is very good in such cases. Do you suppose the animal could negotiate the distance up to our house? If father could take charge of him he might save him."

The little eleven-year-old Ashe girl, May, paid no attention to this speech. She was watching a gray gopher sitting on its tail and whistling merrily. But Catherine, the eldest, and Winifred, the middle one, looked attentively at the boy who had grown quite out of their memories, Catherine because his speech was so different from that which she expected to hear from a country lout—or from any boy of her acquaintance—and Winifred because he looked so queer for a boy who talked like that.

Catherine was almost exactly Fremont's age, but she

looked older. Perhaps this was because she was made serious by the loss of her mother, and by having the Ashe household on her mind and hands. Fremont would have been surprised to learn that this motherly young woman who looked so carefully after her sisters and her father was even a little younger than he. Winifred was fourteen, but she seemed to Fremont quite as old as himself, and the tide of life which swelled in her seemed to agitate the air about her until he felt the spiritual vibration. May was eleven and looked nine—a little dark impish thing who cared nothing about Fremont, the horse, or even the gopher now, but wanted to get on to the ice-cream and lemonade stands in the grove.

In the boy who spoke of "horse ailments" and wondered if the animal could "negotiate" the distance to his home, they saw a tall and awkward yokel dressed in his best suit, which had cost fifteen dollars. It was far too heavy and hot for the season and was, for a boy six feet tall, inevitably too short in the arms and sleeves, even after the seams had been let down. His stiffly starched shirt, the bosom slightly frayed by former wearers from whom he had inherited or impressed it, and well displayed by the unbuttoning of the vest down to the lowest button, was a triumph of his mother's slavish work, but the collar had not called for any of her skill. It was a nice paper collar of the sort that came a dozen in a box which cost twenty-five cents. Fastened to the collar button by a loop of rubber cord was a made-up blue tie of the color of Fremont's eyes. His head was sheltered by a new hat of carefully braided straw which his sister Abbie had made for him from last year's wheat-stems. On his feet he wore good kip boots, well greased the night before, into which his trousers legs were tucked so as to display the beautiful tops, which were green-bronzed in front, nearly up to his knees. From under his hat peeped a fringe of yellow hair which betrayed the

fact that his brother Henry was not a barber. His face was covered with the down that Henry had suggested might be removed by cream and the cat—down which greatly resembled in color that on his mother's ducklings, and in texture, too, save that above the corners of his mouth and on the points of his chin it had coarsened and begun to curl in an unmistakably beard-like manner greatly to his embarrassment when his associates told him in the proper tone that he ought to wash his face. And yet, thought Catherine and Winifred, he talked in a way that reminded them of the doctor's wife, who had been to Cornell College down at Mount Vernon. And, thought Winifred, to look like that! But there was something kind of nice in those great blue eyes of his.

In the horse, the race between colic and vitality seemed about to be won by the dissyllabic challenger. Fremont suggested that they unhitch him, and let Fremont's team draw the carriage while he led the other horse.

"I can leave my buggy here," said he.

"We'll walk," said Catherine.

"I'm afraid to take him out," said Captain Ashe. "I'm afraid he'll lie down. If he does we'll never get him up."

"If I walk," said Winifred, "I'll get my dress all dust!"

"There's room in this buggy for three," said Fremont. "I'll walk, and one of you can drive my horses. Don't be afraid if they prance around a little."

"Come, girls," cried Winifred, springing in, and disappointing Fremont because she gave him only the merest touch of her elbow.

The horse made satisfactory progress toward Alvin McConkey's skill; but there stood Fremont and his equipage, while May was running over the prairie gathering flowers, with Catherine calling her back, and Winifred wriggling about in the buggy and asking them if they were *never* coming.

"Let's go on!" said she to Fremont. "If they want to get their dresses all stained, why, let 'em!"

"We'll walk," called Catherine. "The grass is clean. Never mind us."

Fremont got in beside this new girl from town, and made an exaggerated kissing sound with his lips, at which his team almost lifted the wheels from the ground. She clung to his arm, not on account of the kissing sound, but because she was startled by this friskiness of the horses. There was something rather impressive in the way he brought them down to a mincing trot. This gave Winifred another opening in a conversation which was, to say the least, lagging, since Fremont had not spoken.

"How strong you are!" said she. "It must be nice to be strong."

Fremont stole a glance at her. Even a man broken by the treachery of Dorinda might look. She was holding on by the brace of the buggy-top, and looking with interest at the horses.

"They ran away last winter," he replied, "but it doesn't take much of a man to drive them now."

Then he began hating himself because he could think of nothing except such banalities, he who, when out in the field, or in conversation carried on with imaginary companions, when in bed, or as he walked back and forth to school, never found himself in a situation—no matter how exalted in station or beautiful in form and feature the lady might be—in which he was not able to talk fluently and eloquently. Dog-gone it!

"How pretty the Fourth-of-July stuff looks in their manes and tails," said she. "Did you braid it in?"

"Yes," said he.

She glanced at him, and saw that he grew suddenly red and then pale. Then, she told Catherine, he heaved the awfulest sigh! She would not have marveled had she sus-

pected the wave of tragic feeling which filled him when he recalled the joy in his heart as he did that braiding of manes and tails, or of the fact that he was disgraced and ruined.

Mr. McConkey's expert opinion was that the horse had either pin-worms or bots, or maybe just a touch of the colic, and that if they would stay the day with us, and have dinner, we could fix him up with some medicine that they always used for most everything, outward and inward, Nerve and Bone Liniment.

"Jest croppin' around in this blue-grass," said he, "when he gets a little better, will be as good as medicine. He ain't bad sick."

"Well, girls," said the captain, "that means that we'll have to miss Governor Wade's speech, unless this young man will escort you. I'm broke down."

Fremont blushed again, and then he grasped the idea as a means of salvation. Just now his team and buggy had been a crushing and disgraceful liability. It called loudly for something to do, and alas, there had been no work for it. Now perhaps Captain Ashe and his pretty daughters would create a new and masking set of circumstances, and all he would have to account for in the future would be Bill Blake's elimination. The Dorinda Doughty problem would be solved.

"You can take my team," said he. "Bill Blake rode in with some one—and he can catch a ride back. I'd like to have you take my team and your carriage, and go."

"Oh, do, pa," urged May, "and then we won't miss the fireworks!"

"Generous, ain't she?" observed her father. "This boy was making a holiday with this rig for himself. We can't rob him of it."

"Do not mention it," said Fremont in his best manner, of which he was afterward proud. "It will be a favor to me if you will take them."

"There is room in our buggy," said the middle Ashe girl, "for all of us."

CHAPTER IV

FREMONT JOINS IN INSURRECTION

I AM ASHAMED of Fremont, for as he rode along, driving his pretty horses to Captain Ashe's two-seater, he was conscious at times of Winifred Ashe in the rear seat. He was not equally aware of Catherine or of their little sister May who sat between them. Purely as a matter of experience, for a creative genius, who had not as yet made his selection among the various fields of art, but might be a novelist, a poet, or a sculptor, this his first contact with a girl from town was worth the little thrill it gave him as he remembered that she had for a mile or so occupied Dorinda's place in the buggy seat. It was for Winifred that he jumped out and gathered some red roses by the bank of Willow Creek. He had the impulse to try a quotation from Tennyson:

"Rosy is the West,
Rosy is the South,
Roses are her cheeks,
And a rose her mouth."

But just as he felt panic at the very thought, she gave him something else to think of.

"Did you ever flip a penny out from under a card on your finger, and leave the penny without moving it?" she asked him.

"Yes," said he, wondering.

"What makes the penny lie still?" she queried.

"Its inertia," answered Fremont.

"There!" said she, turning triumphantly to Catherine. "I told you he's the same boy!"

"What you trying to get at, Winnie?" asked her father. "What same boy?"

"He came to our house once with his father," said Winifred. "Didn't you? It was about some land. You're the neatherd!"

"Might have been when your father bought his farm," suggested Ashe.

"Yes," said Fremont, and relapsed into unpoetical silence.

"Hope he appreciated the bargain I give him."

"He says he wishes he had stayed on the Finster place and run the herd," said Fremont. "The wheat rusted and blighted last year and the year before, and don't bring anything much; and we miss the money we used to get from our herd."

"Pshaw!" scoffed the man from the village. "This few seasons of bad crops is what we always get in new countries. Won't last long. Land ownin'—that's the secret of success. Tough it through, an' you'll be big-bugs some day. See that wheat right now, how tall and rank it is!"

Fremont modestly suggested to the enthusiastic captain that this tall rank wheat was already rusting and blighting. This was the nightmare of the Iowa farmers, the diseases of the wheat. To sow vast fields to the grain, to harrow it promptly so as to save it from the great flocks of pretty little horned larks which under the name of "wheat birds" filled their crops with it if it was left exposed to them, to watch it spring up so green and lush, to see it shoot up its heavy heads as if to bring forth twenty-fold, and then, on some fine Sabbath morning, to stroll forth to exult over the prospect of money for the mortgage and the doctor's bill and the account at the store—and find on the green straw the red rust, or the black blotches, which destroyed

all prospect of anything but a small return of shriveled kernels. This was what robbed the McConkey family of every hope save that which springs eternal, and may account to the puzzled critic for what he terms the inveterate pessimism of the farmer. These farmers were being plunged every year deeper and deeper into poverty, while tilling the richest soil in the world.

But Captain Ashe was a typical town-dweller, and was very optimistic for the farmers. He was not growing wheat. He exulted over the rapid development of the country, but in this Fremont, though a boy, was his superior in knowledge and experience.

"I used to herd cattle all over that prairie," said Fremont, pointing out over a shadow-mottled landscape of wheat growing in great squares and oblongs, bearded heads bowing toward the road on the west and leaning away on the east, with here and there a blossom of purple cockle adding to it a touch of color. "If the crop ain't better than it looks as if it would be now, it would be better for us if it were all prairie sod again."

"Aw," protested the captain, "old Monterey'll be all right. The Injun ain't out of the soil, yet. It ain't civilized. Cheer up, Fremont!"

"How pretty the shadows look as they move along!" exclaimed Winifred.

"It reminds me of a poem," said Fremont.

"Verses, you mean?" asked May. "Tell it to us."

"Autumn's dying,
Moaning, sighing.
Clouds are flying,
On like steeds;
While their shadows,
O'er the meadows,
Walk like widows,
Decked in weeds."

There was silence after this. Winifred and Catherine were thinking of how funny this boy was, whom they had allowed to pick them up—and looking at him with some respect. Fremont was humiliated, after thinking a moment, because his quotation (from the Fourth Reader) must have been familiar to all of them, and described an autumn scene, while here they were in the flush of summer. The captain was uneasy because Fremont was not driving faster.

"I'm afraid we won't get there in time to hear the Governor's speech," said he, and Fremont accelerated the horses' pace.

They were missing something historical. This celebration was a great event in the history of Monterey County. It had repercussions all over the state and outside the state, for it was one of the beginnings of a new era in American history. To the casual observer it was merely an astounding success in the demonstration of the strength of the new organization of farmers in the Grange —the Patrons of Husbandry—and is so remembered by the old settlers. It was the high point in Grange history in Monterey County. It made the day memorable in the life of Fremont McConkey, for it was his first peep into politics; he thinks it the most memorable in his whole life up to that time, when all the consequences are summed up, not only in that respect, but in his private life. It was the day of beginnings; whereas, at eight o'clock it had appeared like one of endings.

Any old Iowan will remember how the Grange movement swept over the state in the early 'seventies, and no old settler on Monterey Prairie will disagree with me when I declare that the greatest factor in a personal way in this groundswell of agrarian agitation was Governor Wade. He was the big gun in his party, and an insider at Des Moines. So he had taken control of this new organization in order to keep it within the lines of safety, sanity, and social rather

than political activities. But another movement was rising behind it, following as one hunter traces the footsteps of another. And the second hunter was after bigger game. This was an agitation, born of the poverty of the farmers and of their accumulating misfortunes, for the formation of a new party. The name they had for it then was the Anti-Monopoly Party. The idea had taken a strong hold on the grangers of Monterey County. Governor Wade, who had been one of the organizers of the Republican Party only a few years before, saw red when the Anti-Monopoly Party was mentioned. He called the whole thing a damnable heresy, aimed at the great party which had saved the Union. And for it to take possession of this most fraternal order for which he had made himself responsible, was treason; and these Anti-Monopoly organizers proposed to use the very granges which he, DeWitt Clinton Wade, had personally organized, as centers of this sedition! He was naturally choleric; this raised choler to fury.

And it all looked so festive as they gathered at Crab-apple Grove! The gathering was what Fremont and his new friends were missing. It was a sight to stir the blood. From grange after grange they came with flags and banners and in some cases with earnest, if discordant bands of music. As they neared the grove, their processions, like rills joining to make a river, became consolidated. In the main these long lines were made up of farm wagons drawn by farm horses. The wagon which had spring seats enough to accommodate its freightage of grangers was the exception notable for its style. The marshals were on horseback, most of them clad in old army uniforms with bright sashes across their breasts and riding with all the ease of cavalrymen. But the color was added to the scene by the gay dresses of the women and girls—dresses of poplin, delaine, alpaca, gingham or calico. Their hats were little affairs, brimless, not half large enough to cover their heads and

decked with cheap artificial flowers, but the poke bonnets of twenty years before were in evidence, and many sunbonnets. The girls came in straw hats with their two- or three-inch brims turned up at the side, and gay with flowers and bright ribbons. Their dresses reached within two or three inches of the ground, while their elders had skirts that swept the grass of the grove when they alighted. All the women-folk wore bustles, and their basques and polonaises drew in at tightly-corseted waists, making a long inward curve from the high busts to the expanded skirts. Thus was Beauty made seductive in 1874.

The processions converged on Crabapple Grove, with the stars and stripes waving over them, and bearing banners with patriotic and, in some cases, with what Governor Wade would have called, treasonable mottoes upon them—treasonable at least to the principles of the Patrons of Husbandry. There was a sensation of tension in the air. One could feel that these industrious cultivators of the soil, clodhoppers, whose plowshares had opened an empire to production and civilization, were filled with some passion deeper and more elemental than that merely of celebrating the day when their ancestors had declared that among the unalienable rights of man are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. What they demanded was the possession of it, and not merely its pursuit, for they felt that after pursuing happiness through the forests for a hundred years, and finally emerging from the umbrage of the woods into the sunshine of the open, that their light was turning to darkness. And a number of their banners implied something of this, to the exasperation of the speaker of the day.

Ah, Governor Wade! You are wise to take the alarm! For the ferment of political disorder in the west was here sending up its first bubbles to the surface of the political pot. Before you are through with it you shall see a Jim

Weaver lost to you, a Calamity Weller, a Gillette, a Boies, a Congress agitated by the atrocities of a group of Populists, a Peter Cooper, a Brick Pomeroy, and at this writing no one can say who else; Anti-Monopolists, Greenbackers, Populists, and who knows but before the fever has run its course, Henry Georgeites, and what-not?

But, Governor, you should not wonder at this discontent. Not to see it would be a wonder; for here on this Iowa prairie you are taking part in the first great experiment in the building of a democracy based on ponderous production and deprived of the sea as a highway. You are trying the experiment for the first time of keeping a people economically free while living an industrial and agricultural life and dependent on highways made by man instead of those created by nature. And to the inherent difficulty of the problems presented in this experiment, if you will look over into the wheat-field there just beyond the burr-oaks, you will see in the rust and smut and blight another obvious reason why the Monterey County farmers, on this Fourth of July, 1874, may be expected to come in no very contented spirit. There is the threat of grasshoppers, too, in this west wind. You should remember also that last year happened the catastrophe of which you shall not hear the last while you live, called by you, "the inevitable collapse" and by others "The Crime of '73." Try to remember, too, that these people are in deep distress, and in poverty, in debt with no means of paying, and that they wonder and wonder why, work as they may—and they all work—they are the poorer after each year of slavish labor. Think of these things, and you may be able to overlook the legends:

"AS CITIZENS WE FAVOR THE ANTI-MONOPOLY CONVENTION."

"AS GRANGERS WE KNOW NO PARTY."

There was Bill Blake standing just to the rear of this banner with another which declared: "WE MEAN BUSINESS."

"I like your banners," said Fremont to Bill. "They're the best here. Who painted 'em?"

"August Meyer, our hired man," answered Bill. "He used to be a painter in Germany. They're old persimmons, ain't they?"

"I was driving over to bring you to the celebration this morning," ventured Fremont by way of building his fictional bridge from the Dorinda Doughty tragedy to a theory consistent with his own continued existence.

"Didn't you bring no girl?" asked Bill.

"Huh!" snorted Fremont. "Likely!"

"I thought you'd asked Dorinda."

"Looks like it, don't it?"

"Wal," pursued Bill, "why didn't you come on for me?"

"I had an adventure," said Fremont. "Found Captain Ashe from the Centre with a sick horse, and hitched my team in and brought them. And now I guess I'll let him drive the team back and I'll go over to Lithopolis for a little visit."

This idea of the Lithopolis visit was an inspiration, not a thought. It came without cerebration. It would subject him to criticism at home, but that, taken with the delay of his return, and the Lithopolis news, might divert the minds of Henry and Abbie and the others from his queer behavior of the morning. The thought was a stroke of genius, emerging directly from the subjective mind; and just as he was almost smiling over it, Foster Blake returned to the banner he had left in Bill's care, smelling a little of beer (it must be set down as a historical fact), and turning the "We Mean Business!" toward the speaker's stand stated in a low voice to all and sundry: "The speech comes now!

Wonder what the gov'nor's waitin' fer all this time? There he comes. Se' down!"

Fremont and Bill sa' down on the plank bench. The hum of conversation died. The pastor of the Monterey Centre Methodist Church prayed. The Declaration of Independence was read, *The Star Spangled Banner* was sung without the soloist's voice breaking on the word "glare"—in itself a memorable thing. And now they waited so long for Governor Wade to take his place on the rostrum that they had begun to feel that stressful uneasiness experienced by any assemblage under unexplained delays, especially when conscious of the melting butter in the picnic luncheons. Now they buzzed again, but when the governor arose, all was as quiet as the most fastidious speaker could have desired. His face was inflamed with the passion of anger into which disgust and the Vandemark Township Grange had worked him. His appearance stopped every audible activity, save the bunch of firecrackers which as a matter of course went off as the speaker took his stand at the desk.

The governor's portentous look riveted every eye to his face. He struck his right fist on the desk; he raised his left arm for attention and then he shook his clenched right hand at the Vandemark Township delegation. He spoke in a choked voice, with no formal opening.

"I refuse to speak," he yelled, "while that dirty political rag floats over my head!"

Before there was any reaction to this outburst, Fremont McConkey's habit of mind caused him to note two things—and that with wonder at the governor's utterance: the first, that the banner could not be said to float over anything; being firmly tacked to a frame, it simply stood with Absalom Frost holding it up. Second, it was not over the governor's head, but down below and in front of him at an angle of at least twenty degrees from the plane of the hori-

zon. To these defects of style, Fremont was adding the query as to the context—Why did he call it a dirty political rag?—when the storm broke.

The storm is remembered by old settlers to this day—that tempest of rebellion and indignation. It was the first rumble of the thunder which shook down some old institutions, and will change more of them, if my judgment is correct, in the future.

The appalling idea of a contest with Governor Wade held the assemblage of grangers for a moment silent. Then the Vandemark Township men rose and formed a group about the banner. One might have remembered the clashing of the shields of the knights when the heralds in the presence-chamber of Louis hurled at the king the defiance of Charles the Bold. Absalom Frost shot a fiery look at the angry figure on the rostrum, turned and caught the expression in Foster Blake's eye, and advanced the banner half a foot. Uncle Jake Vandemark stepped out of the crowd and lined up with his old fellow pioneers. The non-combatant Dunkards, Amos and Peter Bemisdarfer, felt their Dutch rising, and supported the flanks of the lengthening line. Magnus Thorkelson's red Norwegian head, now graying a little, glowed like a sun rising over the other heads just back of the banner. Foster Blake moved up the "We Mean Business" banner and planted it beside the other. The Vandemark Township Grange was defying Governor Wade. It felt that it was defying the assemblage, for who could be expected to oppose Governor Wade? It was defying the world.

Fremont McConkey stepped into the front line, thinking of the defiance of Louis, King of France, by Charles the Bold, and the clashing of the shields, but not as Scott describes it. He had only a few days before read of it in a story in the *New York Weekly* by Professor William Henry Peck. He felt the epic quality in the crisis. He

did not feel any shock at the unknightly language of Zenas Smith with which the silence was broken.

"When this banner is tore down," shouted Zenas, "there'll be guts layin' around this grove."

Professor Smith, or Tennyson, or Dickens, or any of the authors whom Fremont tried to imitate, would never, never have put such words into the mouth of any character—but Fremont had never read Hugo's account of the Guardsman who refused to surrender at Waterloo. Zenas's speech was vulgar. It was just what any farmer might have said—but it was great. It was epic. It fitted the word to the idea.

It meant something to Walter Byington of the Willow Creek Grange, who was cured then and there of his itch for chairmanships. Governor Wade, the irresistible force, had crashed headlong into the immovable body of Vandemark Township Grange. These farmers had displayed the banner which James B. Weaver, who was that day within two weeks of being thimblerigged out of his nomination for Congress at Ottumwa, took up later and bore gallantly until his death. Walter Byington wished there was some one present to bear it somewhere now. If the governor would not speak, the exercises were over, and he might as well call on the pastor of the Congregational Church to pronounce the benediction. Or the banner must be removed —and everybody had heard what Zenas Smith had said about what I have mentioned being strewn about the grove. Was it the chairman's move? And if so, what move was open to him? From far back in the assemblage a voice sounded sweetly in his ear.

"I move," it said, "that we vote on the question of taking down the banner."

"Second the motion!"

It seemed as if five hundred voices joined in the very American second to the motion of settling a matter of right

or wrong by ballot. The chairman breathed again. Some one else had the decision to render now!

The group around the banner drew closer about its foot. Even as the chairman called for the ayes, Foster Blake shouted that he would be damned if any vote would ever lower that flag. Fremont's heart beat high as he thought of how Dorinda Doughty would feel when she heard of his mangled form lying at the foot of the banner after the Vandemark Township Grange had fought off the whole crowd and kept their insignia unstained by defeat. But what was this he heard!

"All in favor of the banner," was the way the chairman put it, "please rise."

Like a field of wheat after the passing of a gust, the whole assemblage rose, and at the wave of Walter Byington's hand, sank again.

"All in favor of removing the banner, rise!"

Fremont McConkey's mouth broadened into a smile of triumph. Not one rose—or yes! Back there one man rose to a stooping posture, looked about as if for support, and dropped back to the bench. The sole voter who supported Governor Wade was Captain Ashe.

"The ayes have it!" announced the chairman. "The banner will remain!"

The chairman's voice broke a little at the word, as he glanced at Governor Wade and saw him sitting there with flushed face and clenched hands. Fremont's triumph was mingled with a dash of pity, for he saw the blood recede and leave the face pale, as the chairman spoke. What the governor would now do was the problem in his mind, as in Walter Byington's. The Vandemark men breathed easier; and then they exulted. They had won, over DeWitt Clinton Wade! The spirit of exultation is seldom moderate.

"I move," said Zenas Smith, "that the banner be draped over the speaker's desk!"

Walter Byington had the discretion not to hear this voice of the victor insulting the slain, and he did the politic thing. Just as Fremont's critical mind was dealing with the question as to how a banner nailed to slats could be draped over anything, the chairman rose and announced:

"And now, I have the great pleasure of introducing our eminent citizen and that member of our Order to whom we owe so much, Governor Wade, who will address you!"

I do not remember what he said, but he spoke. Walter Byington had forced the issue upon him again, and he made his address. Was it weakness? Was it strength? Was it policy? Whatever it was, the governor did not persist in his determination to destroy the Vandemark Township Grange by refusing to speak to it. He faltered at first—Judge Stone, his arch-enemy, said he spluttered—but he spoke. I have never found any one who remembered the content of the speech. I doubt if he could have told after it was over. It was full of sweat, sound and fury signifying nothing. It did not deal with the atrocities of the Vandemark Township Grange, the banners, or the Anti-Monopoly Convention. It was pitiful in its way, for it was the end of the rule in Monterey County of DeWitt Clinton Wade. It did not interest Fremont, who soon lost himself in the crowd. But he had taken his first tentative step into the pool of public affairs. An unfortunate step, as a friend of his soon assured him.

CHAPTER V

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF AN OUTCAST

THE three Ashe girls were laying out their *al fresco* dinner on the blue-grass, under a spreading oak. Fremont walked as near to them as he dared. He desired, yet dreaded to be invited to partake of their meal. He dreaded it because he could think of no code of etiquette for picnic dinners, no matter how he tried to recall all the things he had read. He knew they must be very aristocratic folk, and he might commit some *faux pas*. He knew what a *faux pas* is, quite as well as you do, my dear, though he did pronounce it "Fawkes pass." You must remember that he had never heard it pronounced in his life. He barely glanced at the girls as he went by, and when Winifred saw him and asked Catherine why she had not invited Fremont to eat with them, Cathie said she had not thought of it, but of course father would do it.

Father did not find him, for Fremont unexpectedly met an old friend—met him with a sense of relief. For after he had passed the three sisters, and had not been called back to them, his relief soon gave way to humiliation. He was sure that Winifred had seen him. He had seen her turn to Catherine on looking away from him. He was as dirt under the feet of Dorinda Doughty. He was a yokel in the minds of these great people from town. Yes, he knew the word yokel—though the great folks probably did not. As a yokel, he was unfeignedly glad to meet his old com-

Fremont walked as near to them as he dared.

panion of the prairie, the first appreciative critic of his stories, Bently Bushyager. Fremont was stopped by a hand on his shoulder, and turning, looked into those bullet eyes, set back under the prominent brows above projecting cheek-bones which had faced him on that first day of school for Bently, when the "Preface" to the Second Reader, and to their friendship, stood for "P for Peter, R for Rat, E for Emory, F for Fat, A for Andrew, C for Cat, E for Emory ketched a rat."

"Hello, Bent!" said Fremont.

"Wal, I says to myself," said the laughing Bently, "I'll be damned if it hain't little Freem McConkey! But your two inches higher'n I be!"

"Yes," admitted Fremont, "but you've grown up more than I have. You're a man."

" 'Bout old enough to be," said Bently.

He was better dressed than Fremont, and had all the air of maturity that Fremont lacked. Fremont's face, for all the fuzz, was that of a girl—mobile, sensitive, swept by blushes. Bently Bushyager's had the reticence of a world-wise man, and on his lip lay the black fringe of a mustache. The Bushyagers matured young and took on the activities of their lives which, from the point of view of Elder Skeels, were the lives of outcasts, and from that of Roswell Upright were useful lives, since they had a block of votes which could be controlled by being "nice" to them. Politicians in city slums meet and solve the same political problems in the same way. Why doesn't some one write about rural slums? We had the beginning of one in Monterey County the day old man Bushyager, fleeing from civilization and its burdens, located with his prolific young wife in the timber along the river. This was before there was a house in Monterey Centre, and while Uncle Jake Vandemark was driving on the canal in New York. Fremont, however, had no feeling that he was slumming, as he walked

about with Bently. He liked Bently because he was jolly and companionable, and because they had together caught and tamed white cranes and sand-hill cranes, robbed the nests of wild geese, and reared their goslings hatched under hens, been together in cloud-burst and thunder-gust, dug out badgers and wolves from their dens, and as Fremont said almost in the words of his only poet, Bent was:

"A soul that had toiled and wrought and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took,
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free forehead—"

And why not make a celebration with this companion? He was the only friend, save those of his household, that Fremont had, save that other of questioned character, Bill Blake.

"When ye goin' home?" asked Bent at last.

"I'm trying to catch a ride to Lithopolis," said Fremont. "I guess I'll lay off work a day or so—anyhow to-morrow's Sunday."

"You ride with me in my buckboard," said Bent. "I have to go most through town to git home. Startin' right soon now."

"Where's your rig?" asked Fremont. "I'll be right down as soon as I see a man about driving my team home. There he is now—Captain Ashe. Mr. Ashe!"

The captain was talking with Governor Wade, who had got into his carriage and was about to depart. When the great but humbled man drove off, the captain turned to Fremont.

"My boy," said he, after looking about to see that he was not overheard, "I saw you lined up with that crowd of disorganizers and disturbers when that vote was taken. Let me advise you a little. You're a smart boy, with everything

open to you in the future; but take a fool's advice and steer clear of gangs like that. You've got a lot to learn. Stay with the regulars. Keep in line with the organization. They rubbed it into the governor pretty hard to-day, but long after their Anti-Monopoly balderdash is forgotten, the governor's crowd will be holding the offices and running Monterey County, the State of Iowa, and this glorious Nation! Remember that, if you ever expect to get anywhere!"

"I never expect to get anywhere," said the depressed Fremont.

"Why not?" queried the captain. "You're smart, if you have done a fool thing; and the time will come when I guess we'll have to recognize the rural districts, and give the farmers something. Why not you as well as any one? You'll be of age long before that time comes."

"I—I—yes, I'll remember," said Fremont, who had scarcely an inkling of what the captain's other-worldly advice implied. "I wanted to tell you that I'd like to have you drive my team home for me, and if you will, tell my folks I'm going to Lithopolis."

"All right," said the captain. "Lithopolis, eh? All right, I'll remember. Much obliged for your bringing us in. Hey there, Byington! Want to see you!"

And never a word about the pressing matter of eating dinner with the Ashes! So that was the way of it, he thought, as he rode with Bent Bushyager in the buckboard behind the rat-tailed, fast-going, flea-bitten horse toward Lithopolis.. He had lost caste, because he had lined up with the people whose children he had been teaching for six months. If he had lost caste, then he was an outcast—that was etymologically true. The word pleased him. To be an outcast was interesting—like the plight of Carlos the Terrible. And Bent Bushyager was an outcast, too; for certainly the Doughtys and Ashes would never have anything to do with Bushyagers. Neither would any other

McConkey, unless it might be to change works with them in thrashing—for thrashing obliterates social distinctions, like famine and floods. Fremont's spirits rose to the sort of recklessness which animates a man when he deliberately goes off and gets drunk as a sort of protest against things in general.

"What you be'n doin'," asked Bent, "sence we moved back to the timber, an' you moved out on the prairie—sence we run wild together?"

"Just workin' on the farm," answered Fremont, "and last winter and summer I've been teaching the Vandemark School."

"You talk different," observed Bent. "Books, I reckon."

They were nearing the river now. The land became more undulating, with small clumps of bushes along the watercourses. Here was the little natural grove where the last horse-thief leader they had had, a man named Graves, had been caught with some animals his gang had stolen, years before, when Fremont was a little boy. Fremont remembered a harness-maker who was a Sunday-school superintendent in Elder Skeel's church, and who had shocked every one by "turning state's evidence" in the Graves case, and sending his leader to the penitentiary.

"I wonder where Deacon Owsley is?" said Fremont.

Bently started.

"What made yeh ask that?" he queried sharply.

"Why, right over in that little grove," said Fremont, "is where they found the horses he and old Graves had when Graves was arrested. That made me think of it. I heard that Owsley got into trouble out toward Sioux City for counterfeiting money, and that he'd come back to this neighborhood again. When he was with the Graves gang, he sold father a horse once—stolen, I guess."

"Anybody ever claim the horse from yeh?" asked Bent.

"No," said Fremont. "So it was all right with us."

This lowering of the moral plane of his conversation in accordance with the society in which he found himself rather intrigued him when he recalled it afterward. It seemed to cause Bent to warm up to him.

"Yeh didn't need to care a damn whur he come from," said he. "Sure not!"

"I suppose," said Fremont, "that when he blew on the gang, it was all over with him with men of the right stripe from then on."

"Sure," said Bent, "or oughter be, anyhow."

"I always despised Owsley," said Fremont, "for being a sneak."

"Sure," agreed Bent, "who don't?"

Fremont was growing proud of this conversation. It enabled him to use words and expressions he had learned in his cheap literature, in which such border underworld expressions as "raising" stolen property, "blowing" for confession; "men of the right stripe," "raking down" a person robbed, and the like had become as familiar to him as the golden words of Tennyson. He had read of the Illinois troubles with horse-thieves, and of the cattle rievers of the Scottish Border, but of course, the latter, like the tale of Carlos the Terrible, was beautiful and romantic. The Graves gang did not fit into literature at all, he feared; but if this were only a mountain country, or a coast he might make a story of it. The idea of writing about Iowa and her people flitted through his mind as he used his thieves slang, to Bently's apparent surprise—but who would read about Iowa? He would have to travel to far climes to find anything to write about—and how could he travel? Bently interrupted his thoughts by giving him a bit of underworld news.

"Deek Owsley has come back," said he—"Deek" being derived from "Deacon" in memory of Mr. Owsley's religious activities.

"Where does he hold forth?" asked Fremont.

"Lives off by himself up the river at Crescent City. Ever see his gal, Minnie?"

"No," said Fremont, protesting in his heart at bringing girls into a conversation, purposely guided away from them; for even the Ashe girls had cut him.

"My uncle Claib," said Bently, "married Minnie Owsley last week. She's Minnie Bushyager now!"

They were going down the valleyside to the river and nearing Lithopolis. Spread before them was the straggling village which Judge Stone had founded and expected to see grow into a city, while Monterey Centre languished. Its mill-pond shone in the distance like a bit of blue sea, the largest sea except Plum Puddin' Pond, that Fremont had ever seen, and a wonderful sight. Just one glimpse of it was worth running away for. He magnified the pond in his imagination until it reached the horizon, and turned the far white thunder-heads into great galleons with pearly sails. All the time the other side of his mind was running on with Bently Bushyager's.

"I should think," said he—and he was really thinking aloud—"that you'd hate to have a man like Mark Owsley in your crowd."

He checked himself just in time to prevent the word "gang" from passing his lips, instead of "crowd."

Bent turned off on a byway, and after losing sight of the main traveled road, stopped his horse in the shade of a tree so that Fremont might alight and walk on to the village—but he might have made the pause without coming to this secluded place.

"Freem," said he, "I'm goin' to remember this talk. You c'n remember it 'r fergit it, jes' as you like. You've picked up learnin' someway, and you c'n talk like a lawyer 'r a preacher if you want to; an' you c'n talk like a man o' the right stripe, too. We hain't nobody in our crowd that

c'n do both o' them things. 'S fur's I'm concerned, I hate to hev a man like Deek Owsley anywhur on earth. Now you've been talkin' round an' round things as we come along. Wal, I'll say if you want to come in with us an' be one of us you c'n do it, I reckon; but if you don't want to, the less of this pryin' 'round yeh do, the safer it'll be fer yeh! See?"

Here was a new Bently Bushyager—a mature fellow, who spoke with a decision that bore marks of capacity for leadership. Fremont was taken off his feet.

"Yes," said he, "I see. Much obliged for the ride. See you again."

"Wait," said Bently, "what you goin' to do to-morrow?"

"I hadn't planned anything but visiting my Uncle Steve Lawless in Lithopolis."

"We're goin' giggin' f'r fish in the river Sunday night," said Bently, "come up and go along."

"All right," said Fremont, "I will."

To go spearing fish on a Sunday night was a fearful thing for a McConkey. It was as bad as playing cards. To go with the Bushyagers raised the act in culpability from a sin to a misdemeanor—you are not a lawyer if you do not see that a sin merely loses you your soul, while a misdemeanor may subject you even to confinement in jail or the payment of a fine, and in law this is much more serious. And to accept this dubious invitation the very next moment after having been practically invited to join the Bushyager gang—well, the thing was too immense for prompt evaluation.

Once Fremont's sister Sarah, when she was a little thing, climbed up the rain-board. But I must explain. The rain-board of Early Neolithic Iowa, and in the similar state of culture all over the land, was an inch board laid on a cross-piece nailed to the corner of the house, and slanting down to its lower end in a barrel, the rain-barrel, into which

we used to whistle, as set forth in the old ditty, to hear it ring in marvelous harmonies and overtones. The rain-board caught the rain from the eaves, and in the barrel this rain-water bred mosquitoes, and with them malaria (which we thought came from bad air), and served to wash the clothes. For all the well water was hard, as it is in any good agricultural country, because of the lime in the soil, which makes good clover, keeps the soil rich and makes land valuable, which makes it too expensive for poor men to own, which makes landlordism, which causes ultimate revolution, which destroys houses with cisterns, which brings back the rain-board and the rain-barrel and malaria, and the Early Neolithic Age without its primitive innocence. Well, as I remarked little Sarah climbed up the rain-board and out on the eaves of the wing of the house where the cooking was done. She slid down to the eaves, as Fremont explained to her, owing to the force of gravity. She could not stop at the eaves, so she made the best of it and leaped to the ground, to her serious damage. But, as she described this adventure of jumping off the house, "It was nice until I struck the ground."

Fremont in accepting the Bushyager invitation was leaping from the eave, aided by the force of gravity. He made no attempt to evaluate the problem. He was so easy in his mind that he whistled happily as he strolled on into Lithopolis. Almost any leap is nice till you strike.

CHAPTER VI

HOPPER-GAZING IN LITHOPOLIS

UNCLE STEVE LAWLESS, having eaten his share of Aunt Zuby's Fourth of July dinner, strolled out to the stable to look at the pride of his heart, Maggie and Nibsie, the mares which drew the stage between Lithopolis and Monterey Centre. He had risen in the world since the time when he merely hauled wood. He now carried passengers and the United States mail, making the trip out to the Centre one day, and back the next, regular as the movements of the solar system, in spite of the fact that he had been a drummer boy in the War of 1812. Therefore, he was an important man in Lithopolis. He dropped into the local watch-maker's to see about the watch by which his movements were guided in cloudy weather.

"Lew," said he, handing the timepiece to the artisan, "gi' me some kind of a turnip that'll sort of prop up my judgment when I look at the sun, an' take another runnin' jump at this regulator of mine."

"Didn't it run after I fixed it?" asked Lew.

"Up hill an' down, with the stage," said Uncle Steve, "when the rig did; an' that's all. Now you've had two guesses at this watch, but I'll give yeh another whack at it. If she don't ecker this time, it's the amen trip."

Leaving Lew with his glass in his eye studying the watch, Uncle Steve "sagatiated," as he called it, down the short street. In front of Roswell Upright's Livery and

Sale Stable he found a group of villagers and loitering farmers, who, a curious observer might have thought, had suddenly taken advantage of the holiday to take up the study of astronomy, for they were to a man standing in the street, or on the plank sidewalk, peering as close to the sun as the shadows of upheld hands would allow. Evidently, they were looking for something of importance, for as Uncle Steve halted, Roswell Upright drove up with a team attached to a buggy, passed in through the wide doors, and without unhitching, joined the group and began studying the sun with the rest.

"There goes one!" exclaimed a boy.

"I guess you're seein' thistledown," some one replied.

"Foresighted boy," said Uncle Steve, "if he gits sight of thistledown this time o' year. They're jest trying to make up their minds whuther it's wuth while to blossom or not."

"What you looking for, Uncle Steve?"

It was Fremont McConkey who spoke. He had just joined the group unobserved by the upward-looking assemblage.

"Calamity," said Uncle Steve. "Day o' jedgment, you know. How's all the folks, Fremont? Didn't know you was in this part o' the moral heritage."

"There goes two," said a boy of about Fremont's age who held a violin case in one hand, while he shaded his eyes with the other and scanned the edge of the sun. "And there's another—and another! Why, if you look close enough to the sun, you can see lots of 'em like white specks. It's only the low ones we've been seein'."

"By mighty!" said Roswell Upright, who had stepped into the barn, and come out with a piece of smoked glass in his hand. "I believe he's right!"

"What is this you're trying to see?" said Fremont.

"Take this an' look, Freem," said Upright, handing him

the bit of glass. "Look right close to the edge of the sun. See any white specks sailin' along with the wind steady-like 's if they was late gittin' somewhere?"

"Yes," said Fremont. "I see quite a number of 'em, but not as many as Owen spoke of. Look like dragon-flies to me—snake-feeders, you know."

"Snake-doctors dart around," said the boy who had made the original discovery. "They can't fly straight ahead for a rod if they try. I tell you, they're grasshoppers. I was out in Buena Vista County las' summer, an' I know 'em when I see 'em. W'y, they lit on the wheat stalks till their heft bent the wheat to the ground. When the sun was low it glistened on 'em till you'd 'a' thought the field was a sheet of water; an' they eat the crops to the ground. After harvest, if we'd 'a' had any harvest, they filled the ground with their aigs till it was a reg'lar honeycomb. I've seen so many hoppers on the railroad tracks that they stopped trains by mashin' to grease on the rails. I saw a red barn so covered with 'em that in the sunshine you'd 'a' thought it was new painted with isinglass stuck on it. My aunt wrote us that they eat up everythin' green out there as soon's it was up in the spring exceptin' the prairie grass, an' folk'll have to live on milk and butter this year, an' on turkeys that eat the hoppers. But she wrote that they was leavin' there an' comin' this way—an' now they're here!"

"Says Jeremiah, the Prophet," interjected Uncle Steve.

"I believe they're here," said the boy called Owen.

"We'll be as full of 'em by night," said Upright, looking at Owen's violin case, "as hell is full of fiddlers."

"Or horse-jockeys an' men that take county contracts," retorted Owen, "an' that's fuller yet."

"Fiddlers," said Uncle Steve, "don't go to hell. They go to Fiddlers' Green fifteen miles beyond. But we'll be all ruint in a bunch if the grasshoppers come in as thick as the bad place will be with the fellers Owen speaks of.

eh, Raws? The eternal bung *will* be loose! Boy kind o' got yeh there, Raws!"

All over the county, all over the section of the West, everywhere along the border of the regions that had been visited by the grasshopper scourge, there were groups of people gazing sunward that day, looking for those white, steady-going specks. We used to see them from time to time, as in this case, when they either did not represent the scrouge, or when they did not alight, or came down in numbers so few as to do no material harm; but whenever we saw them, we were worried, anxious, or panic-stricken according to temperament.

The nerves of the farmers who had revolted at Crab-apple Grove that day were on edge. Revolutions come of overstrained nerves rather than by reason. Every day these farmers were watching for the oncoming scourge of grasshoppers. They saw the wheat menaced by mysterious blasting diseases threatening their very livelihoods; and found themselves existing on a plane lower than that occupied by the pioneers of twenty years before. They believed that the eternal bung was loose at the moment, to adopt a Lawlessian locution. They who waited impatiently for the dew to evaporate before they went to their morning's work, who reaped their fields by moonlight as well as in the beating sun of noonday, only to be stricken by want in the midst of promised plenty, who were stripped bare by clouds of locusts, who had spent their youths in migrating to a land of promise only to find the promise broken; and out of hearts which were breaking also, as they saw foison turned to dearth in a week, they asked Governor Wade when he held forth on his favorite subject that honest industry is the road to success, who were more honestly industrious than they?

"Thought I saw you over at the Grove, Freem?" said Mr. Upright, who knew the first name of more people in the county than any other man in it.

"I came away early," replied Fremont.

"See the big doin's?" asked Upright. "Thought I saw you over among the rebels votin' against Governor Wade?"

Fremont blushed. Voting was as new a thing for him as being jilted or getting an invitation to embrace the career of a local Carlos the Terrible. It had, indeed, been a hectic day.

"Gran'father Grievous!" exclaimed Uncle Steve in a tone of horror. "You ain't be'n an' gone an' done it by votin' ag'in' Governor Wade, have yeh, Freem? An' I've took such pains with your bringin' up!"

"Me, too," said Upright. "Went an' built a schoolhouse for him, an' made him the prize scholar of it. An' now see what he's done!"

"I didn't see you vote the other way," said Fremont.

"Nobody seen me," said Upright. "I hunted the tall timber."

"W'y, Raws," inquired Uncle Steve, "they hain't sprung a 'lection on us over there at the peckneck, an' me not there, have they?"

The Upright theory as disclosed by his explanation was that there was lots to say on both sides; but he would have to look into this Anti-Monopoly Party before he could say what it might promise. Any good man must feel a little sympathy for the governor in his humiliation, new party or no new party.

"Wal," said Uncle Steve, "I should think you'd be ag'in' a new party right now when you've got the old one waywised and broke nice. And so they sot on Wade," he went on dispassionately. "I call that mutiny, an' heresy on the high seas, an' mighty clus to misdemeanor. Come on, Freem, le's sagatiate around a little, grasshoppers or no grasshoppers. I got to get shaved."

They entered a combined barber-shop and billiard hall. Two barbers strolled in from the street where they had been

grasshopper-gazing through Roswell Upright's smoked glass.

"Always git a boughten shave on the Fourth," said Uncle Steve, whose shaving consisted in the reaping of the small area on each side from the temples to a point on a level with the corners of the mouth. "Have a shave on me, Freem."

How long, how very long since morning, when Henry had referred to the licking of the cat! Uncle Steve was astonished to see Fremont take his seat in the chair with no hesitation or sign of embarrassment save his ever-ready blush. When he emerged from it, he was not only smooth shaven, but his hair was shingled rather close. I do not like it, for it takes from the poet in him, and makes him more like Owen Gowdy who has come in and sat down waiting for Fremont to be at liberty. More like people in general. He was unique a moment ago; now that fuzzy distinction is gone, and not even a Byronic collar and a huge cowlick over his eye could bring back the boyish face that Kate McConkey so yearns over when she sees it in repose. The world's sandpaper had begun on Fremont.

But the one fleeting glance at himself which he took as he adjusted his made-up tie before the mirror was an epochal thing. If he had only had this magic touch of the barber before he had asked Dorinda Doughty to go with him, or before he had seen Winifred Ashe—I make no excuse for him, my dear, for coupling the names—how different things might have been! Quotations swarmed to his mind as he stuck the bows of the tie under the points of his paper collar: "Alas, how easily things go wrong!" and "A little cloud, a little cloud that scarce might tell of storms to be!" and that poem of the twain who went down opposite sides of a rill, and ultimately found a river between them—all little things which made oceans of difference. But when he thought of a poem on the benefits of a shave,

his mind revolted from the idea, and he turned to endure the chaffing of Uncle Steve. But that gentleman—he was one in the best sense—understood, and refrained.

"An' now that you shine like a nigger's heel," said he, "I s'pose you'll want to show some of the girls how you carry sail. I've got to go down the street and kill a man. Come 'round an' show your appetite to your Aunt Zuby about supper-time."

The stomach of seventeen, cheated of its midday meal, and Dorindaed out of its breakfast, could not brook the delay until Aunt Zuby's supper-time.

"I've got to have something to eat," said he to Owen Gowdy.

"The church ladies," said Owen, "have got a table down by the mill-pond. I'll go down with you."

Owen was a good boy, if he was a fiddler. Of course a fellow always felt kind of funny to be seen with him, and awkward when it came to his name. Most people called him Owen Thorkelson, because he was that boy who was born to Rowena Fewkes the day before she was married to Magnus Thorkelson and lay with her new baby in the cabin of Jacobus T. Vandemark out by Vandemark's Folly Slew, and whose christening by the name of Owen Lovejoy Gowdy had so startled the county back just before the war. It glossed over the awful truth. Owen was the only child in all that country, the utterance of whose name carried with it on the part of a lady—and all the women were ladies then—the admission that she knew that a child could possibly be born out of wedlock. But Owen always signed his name "Owen L. Gowdy." Buckner Gowdy, who had given Fremont those marvelous books, and showed him the library at Blue Grass Manor, seemed oblivious of Owen's existence; and Owen's violin playing, which Magnus had taught him, would have set his father against him had there been any such thing as paternal affection in his wild and

hard nature. There was not, apparently. The least of Mr. Gowdy's troubles was any such come-by-chance as this. Fremont had taught Owen's home school. If he took the school next winter, Owen would be one of his pupils. They talked of school things and neighborhood matters. It seemed like going home after a century of absence to have these ordinary affairs recalled to his mind.

"What you going to do to-morrow?" asked Owen.

"Going spearing fish in the river," answered Fremont. "Come on! I'm going with Bently Bushyager. He and I are old friends. We used to herd cattle together when we lived on the Finster place."

Owen hesitated a little at the name of Bushyager, but finally said, "All right, I'll go. When do we start?"

"Come around about one o'clock to Uncle Steve's," said Fremont, "we'll walk out to Bent's."

He was relieved a little at this arrangement which he made without authority from his host. To go off fishing with Owen Gowdy on Sunday afternoon, would be a thing open to question, but it might conceal the Bushyager part of it.

The grasshopper sensation had died out, though here and there a person was still hopper-gazing. The flight either had been insignificant for the present, or the insects were not of the devouring kind. Lithopolis was quiet. It was always quiet, except around the places where intoxicants were dispensed. And it took little interest in the Crabapple Grove celebration, because that was near Monterey Centre, and any affair in which that town was concerned was honored by the tacit or open opposition of Lithopolis.

I hope that this writing may sometime fall into the hands of a group of ancient Greeks. They would understand this antagonism between towns and villages in a region which all lay open to settlement, and they would divine the nature of the disparities between the souls of communi-

ties. I understand that in our own East, and in Europe, little places like Lithopolis now, and Monterey Centre then, are not expected to grow, and that nobody cares much whether they do or not. Monterey Centre is now Monterey, and has its street-cars, packing houses, factories, machine-shops, roundhouses, banks, trust companies, insurance companies and professional baseball team. In a hundred years perhaps she will be content to stay at whatever size she may then have attained; and Lithopolis will have no more stirrings to spread over her narrow river flood-plain and top the bluffs, where the prairie began, than she has now; but in 1874 both these towns expected to grow.

All our western states, counties, villages and townships expected to grow. They had personality. They had community souls. They differed spiritually more than communities do now, as we shall see. The soul of Monterey Centre was a different thing from the soul of Lithopolis, just as if the location of the former out on the open prairie, and the other down by the river bank in the trough which the stream had worn, had drawn to the respective towns varying sorts of people; and as for that Crescent City where Bent Bushyager had told Fremont McConkey that Mark Owsley lived, it was a "lost soul" among the communities, for it was only a deserted grove of greenery on a peninsula made by a bend of the river, whose confused land titles, muddled by its having been sold off in town lots and then bid in for delinquent taxes, retarded for a quarter of a century its development into the beautiful farm which the visitor may see there to-day. It was then a nice, lonely, woodsy, almost unvisited spot, an ideal asylum for a hermit, or an Owsley.

Not so, Lithopolis, and emphatically not so Monterey Centre. They expected to grow and burgeon. Any of the Greeks who planted their towns along the shore of the Ægean, or saw their villages grow into cities under the

shadow of mountains of the Cyclades, will, if they happen to read this, remember, and know, and understand how it was with us Iowans then. For I am writing of the Ancient Greek period of midwestern life, when communities were set out as our farmers planted trees, by thrusting the twigs of cottonwood or willow or Lombardy poplar into the soil, and watching them as they shot up to tempt the forest birds and check the blizzards, and men like the Langworthys, George W. Jones, Antoine Le Claire, William R. Ross, Augustus Cæsar Dodge, Hoyt Sherman and Phineas M. Cassady, James A. Jackson, John K. Cook and William Williams, the founders of Dubuque, Davenport, Burlington, Des Moines, Council Bluffs, Sioux City and Fort Dodge, and the hundreds more of those strange collectivities in which human beings are doomed to be conditioned by their environment for ages yet to come, will be known by the better intellects of the future as beings fit to rank in some fashion with the Æolians, the Dorians and the Ionians of the heroic age of Greece.

They have the same advantage over later comers; they were in at the beginnings of things; and Time is every year writing supplements to their biographies—with foot-notes by you and me—with a pen of structural steel dipped in brick and stone and cement, with human beings for pigments, on a page of glacial drift.

The Bushyagers liked the pigments in Lithopolis better than those that colored Monterey Centre.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT HIS MOTHER SAID

FREMONT'S mother was vexed with herself. Here it was ten o'clock at night and all the family had been asleep for an hour. She herself was weary from her day's work and needed sleep; but she was still up, sewing on a dress for Sarah. She smiled a little to herself as she thought of the shy attentions which Royall Vandemark was paying to her little girl, and resolving that Sarah should have her full years of girlhood before she married any one —though Royall was a good boy, and the son of an honest man, Uncle Jake Vandemark, who would have been better off with his seven hundred twenty acres of land, if some one hadn't fooled him when he was a green boy into buying so much of Vandemark's Folly Slew. But if anything should come of this boy-and-girl entanglement between Royall and Sarah—of course nothing would—there was the high-toned Mrs. Vandemark to be thought of whose people were big-bugs in Kentucky, and had their own slaves. Sarah would have to be given a little better chance. How things were changing since Kate McConkey had wagoned it into Monterey County!

Sarah could get along with Mrs. Thorndyke, the widow of Elder Thorndyke, the pioneer preacher of Monterey Centre who lived with the Vandemarks and who had been good to Virginia Royall Vandemark when that scoundrel, Buck Gowdy, was trying to take advantage of her on the

way into Monterey County nearly twenty years ago—and his wife, Virginia's sister, not cold in her grave! For Mrs. Thorndyke, while a little on her dignity as a preacher's widow, was after all just folks, and was the daughter of a farmer in Massachusetts; but Sarah would have to be trained a little on Mrs. Vandemark's account. Pshaw! What an old fool to set up a family in a minute's dreaming and begin to solve questions like examples in arithmetic! She was in no position to blame Fremont her son for being a dreamer.

And maybe that was why she felt so tender over him, and was really sitting up for him. She would not have done it for Fremont's older brother Henry, even if he had done the unprecedented thing of going away on a Saturday with the intention of coming home at night after the fireworks; and had then sent the team back by Captain Ashe, who had driven away with his horse happily recovered from that one of the numerous ailments which Alvin had said he might have; saying that Fremont had asked him to say he had made other plans—the captain had forgotten what they were—and wasn't going to be home until late that night, or maybe not until the next day. The captain couldn't remember.

"Thank you," said Mrs. McConkey, "Fremont is surely old enough to trust off by himself."

"Old enough and smart enough to trust anywhere," said the captain.

"And," said Winifred, "you must tell him that we were sorry he didn't eat his dinner with us. We sent papa to look for him, but he couldn't find him."

"Went off with somebody in a rig," said the captain. "Much obliged to all of you for the day's accommodations."

"I hope," said Catherine, now the mistress of the Ashe household, "that when you are in town you will come to see us."

All this explained Fremont's failure to let them know just what he had done, and why he was not at home at work, now that harvest was coming on and there was so much to do to get ready for it. The captain had just forgotten. And wasn't Fremont over six feet tall, and doing for himself—all but keeping his wages? She was silly, but she was sitting up for him just the same, wondering as she sewed whether they could not afford, if the wheat was not quite a failure, to buy a cabinet organ, and let Sarah take lessons. She seemed to have a talent for music, and none of the Vandemarks were musical. And just as she was smiling again at her own foolishness, she heard Fremont's step at the door.

"Back at last," said she, as he entered.

"Yeah," said he. "Everybody asleep?"

"I guess so," she said. "We mustn't wake 'em up. What in time've you got there!"

He displayed a fine string of fish.

"Went up the river to Crescent City," said he. "Gave Aunt Zuby all she'd take. Rode out from Lithopolis with Foster Blake. He wasn't quite himself, and stayed late. I was afraid the fish would spoil, but they're all right. I'll have to clean and salt 'em right off, though."

With whom had he been fishing? This was the question which came into her mind; but she had the tact not to utter it. She praised the fish, and agreed with him that they were still good, and said they would surely be a treat for the whole family. How surprised they'd be to have fresh fish for breakfast.

"I had to bring them a peace offering," said Fremont. "But I got something special for you, ma."

He drew from his pocket a package of the best smoking tobacco he could find, and one of the sort which he knew she liked. She took it, smiled her thanks, and grew suddenly grave.

"Didn't you know, Freemie," said she, rather sadly, "that I quit smokin' a long time ago?"

"Why!" exclaimed Fremont, after thinking a moment, "I haven't seen you smoking for a long time, but I didn't know you'd quit. I didn't know you could quit."

"I can quit anything," said she, "an' so can any one else that amounts to anything. Even folks like me that don't amount to much can quit any habit when they want to bad enough."

"Why did you do it?" asked Fremont.

"I didn't want my children to be ashamed of me."

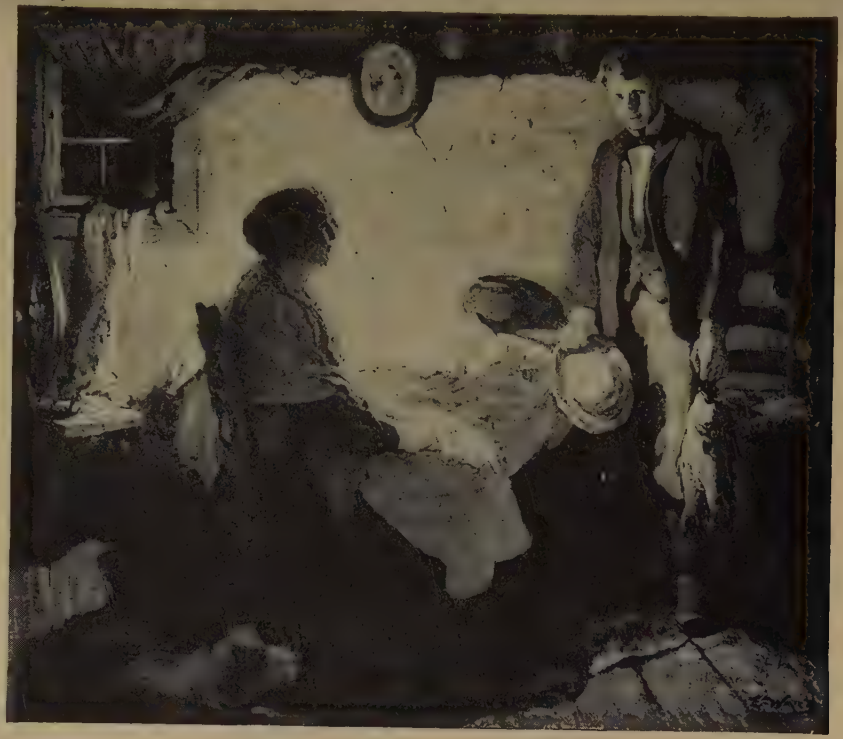
"I'd hate to think you meant that, ma!"

"Or had any reason to be ashamed of me."

"Did you ever hear that any one had made remarks about it?" asked Fremont.

"No," said his mother, "but of course they have. Any one with sense would know that. But it wasn't remarks that made me quit, or the fear of 'em. I ain't easy to stampede. I wasn't brought up in the woods to be scared by owls. But I made up my mind that I wouldn't let a habit I got when I was young, because they said it'd help my stomach trouble, give my children any reason to feel edgeways because I was doin' something that ain't ladylike. I'm ignerant, but I don't have to be worse than I was cut out to be!"

Fremont looked at his mother with tears in his eyes. He knew how fond she was of her tobacco. He had often wished that she had not learned to smoke, but he had long since put aside the disposition to be critical—for was it not her only indulgence? And she had renounced it for him. For there was an understanding between them that he was to be the exceptional one of the family, and not "just a farmer." He laid his hand on hers for a moment—a great thing in the McConkey family. She took his hand and pressed it. These deviations from the norm of his be



"What in time 've you got there?"

havior were equivalent to embraces, blessings, tears and sobs in families which have feelings so manageable that they can afford to yield to them. Old Raleigh was right.

> "Passions are likened best to floods and streams
> The shallow murmur, but the deep are dumb."

"Have you had your supper?" she asked.

"I bought some crackers and cheese, and ate them on the road," he replied.

"Come right into the other room," said his mother, "an' you can eat a bite while I clean the fish. An' you can tell me all about it."

First, he told her, Owen Gowdy had more than he did, for Owen had fished that way before. They snared the first lot—those that didn't have spear marks in them.

"Snared fish?" queried his mother. "W'y, I never heared of such a thing!"

Well, Fremont proceeded to tell, at Crescent City there is a railroad bridge across the river, and the track runs over on top of the trusses, so that a person can climb down to the bottom beams and stand and walk on the timbers right over the water. They took small copper wire, and made nooses just like those used in snaring gophers, only they were made of wire instead of cord, and, therefore, would stay open, and could be dangled right in front of any red-horse, stone-roller, pickerel or bass which might be swimming below, all unconscious of danger. But the fisherman had no surety of landing his fish. When he saw the fish coming up the stream, which is the direction fish go when feeding or on the lookout for victims, he dropped the snare on the end of a line attached to a rod, in front of the fish. If the fish swerved quickly aside, as he was all the time doing, you lost him, unless he dropped down-stream, which he was also likely to do, and came up again. But if you were

artistic in playing the little loop of wire, if you let the current carry it right down over your fish's head, not too low or too high, and not slanted along so that the loop touched the sensitive nose, and when it was fairly over the head, you pulled at exactly the right moment—you had your fish. But you must be careful—as Fremont explained in his scholarly manner—that the fish's center of gravity falls back of the closing snare, for then, the tail hangs down, the wire grips against the slant of the scales, and the fish comes out easily and securely; but if the center of gravity falls forward of the snare, it merely slips back over the scales, comes off the fish's tail, and back into the stream he falls, wondering what it could have been that lifted him so high.

I doubt, my dear boy, whether many of the Iowa rivers would permit of this sort of fishing now. The stream must be clear, you know, and not muddied by the washings of every corn-field and hog-lot in its catchment area. You might try it, however, but first I should consult the law. The stable door is rather tightly locked, now that the horse is stolen.

"But these with the spear marks in 'em?" queried Mrs. McConkey.

"Oh, we got them at night," answered Fremont, now quite carried away by the ardor of the story-teller. "We took torches and waded with spears. Bent Bushyager calls 'em 'gigs.' He calls spearing fish 'gigging' them. The spears all have four tines, with barbs on them. One carries the torch—we took turns—and drags a gunny-sack in the water to put the fish in. The torch is a wire basket filled with what the railroad men call waste soaked with kerosene oil, and just lights up the whole river and makes it easy to see the fish, and sort of bewilders 'em so they don't run away. It's fun, but not as much as snaring them, because the water makes your feet cold."

"You didn't wade barefooted, did you, Freemie?"

"No, I wore an old pair of boots that Bent lent me, and Claib let Owen have a pair."

Mrs. McConkey never even started at this revelation of the personnel of Fremont's party. They were busy at the kitchen sink cleaning and scaling their fish.

"I hope you didn't take cold," said she. "It hain't quite safe, wading that way for hours in the night with nothing to eat."

"Oh, we had a good meal at about two o'clock in the morning," replied Fremont. "You see we started in at the head of the deep water in the dam above Lithopolis, and fished on up to Crescent City, and when he got there we were ready to quit. So we did, and Minnie Bushyager—she was Minnie Owsley, but was married to Claib Bushyager the other day—had a good hot meal for us that she cooked at Deek Owsley's place at Crescent City. He's her father, you know."

Mrs. McConkey could see this party. The two Bushyager boys, and maybe other Bushyagers, and Minnie, and maybe Sally Bushyager who used to go to school with Fremont, and must now be full-grown, since she was a year or two older than Fremont, and the smooth and plausible Deacon Owsley, whom she remembered when he was a Sunday-school superintendent, and the banquet for the hungry fishermen in the small hours of the night, and no knowing what there might have been in the way of drinking.

"I kind of wish," said she, "that Owen hadn't be'n there."

Fremont looked at her in astonishment. He had relied on Owen to take the cuss off, as a less cultured person might have said.

"Why?" he inquired. "Owen's a good boy."

"Yes," said his mother, "but he may be a scholar of yourn if you teach the Vandemark School next winter, and

some might think it wouldn't look just right. An' then, Owen has misfortune enough in the way he came into the world, without huntin' anything but the best he can find after he's born into it. I'm afraid Rowena Thorkelson may feel a little bad about it. As fur's you're concerned, I should be ashamed to be reely worried. I should be ashamed to think that I had reason to be!"

There was a considerable silence here. Fremont could think of nothing to say. His mother had brought him back from his status of an outcast, back from the realm of Carlos the Terrible, back from the Sabbath-breaking companionship of the Bushyagers, back from the man who had sampled Bowie Bushyager's whisky, and wished Dorinda Doughty could have seen him drinking it and had known that she had driven him to it, back from the man who had noted with mingled feelings of repulsion and attraction that Sally Bushyager was disposed to be overkind to him, that she had the figure and perhaps the nature of an Aphrodite with a face in which all the bullet-head and eyes and ugliness of Bent were accentuated—back to the world of the schoolmaster who was to be the exceptional man of the family, in spite of the fact that according to Mrs. Absalom Frost the Sign was wrong when he was born. Well, maybe there was something to this Sign superstition. Mrs. McConkey waited just long enough for her masterly handling of the situation to have its effect.

"Wal," said she, just at the moment when her remarks seemed to call for further elaboration, or to demand a reply, neither of which she desired—in other words, at the psychological moment—"that's as nice a mess of fish as I've seen for a dog's age. They certainly will be a treat! But it's long past time for honest folks to be in bed, an' for workin' people, too, whuther they're honest or not; an' I hope we're as honest as we are workin'. Maybe you'd better

not git up in the mornin', Freemie. This is the second night you hain't had your sleep."

"I'll get up all the same, ma. Be sure to call me. I must make up for lost time. I'll be all right. Good night, ma!"

I shall not make the claim that Fremont tossed on a sleepless couch; but it was some time after he had stretched himself beside the slumbering Henry before he lost consciousness. The little speech of his mother on the state of the nation echoed through his mind; and before he fell asleep, he resolved that he would not teach the Vandemark School next year. He could get other schools, for he had already earned the reputation of being a good teacher. There was a school over in the new German settlement on the prairie where he and Bent Bushyager had herded cattle which he knew he could get. So he would not be Owen Gowdy's teacher, after having tempted him into Sabbath-breaking and association with bandits—if they were bandits, which nobody could prove, though Fremont knew. Neither would he make it necessary for Dorinda Doughty to choose between staying out of school, and becoming again the pupil of the man she had driven to the status of an outcast. He would never take on again the relation which put him *in loco parentis* to Dorinda. He liked that Latin expression, but the *loco-parentis* business was at an end forever between them. So much for the Vandemark School.

He felt as if an age had passed since the morning of the Fourth—and it was now only the sixth, or the small hours of the seventh. During this age, he had been crushed by the faithlessness of Dorinda Doughty.

He had been accorded a taste of the society of the town and of the town girls. They had been friendly to him. They remembered him as the neatherd.

And then, they too had thrown him off and slighted him!

He had joined a rebellion, and seen the great Governor Wade humiliated. He had broken away from the farm work in a manner unprecedented in the McConkey family, and gone fishing.

He had gone with the suspected Bushyagers. He had drunk one glass of Bowie Bushyager's whisky. While under its not over-potent influence he had put his arm around Sally Bushyager's waist—the first time he had ever done such a thing to any girl—and had felt her snuggle up to him as if she liked it. He had been hail-fellow-well-met with half a dozen Bushyagers—and with Mark Owsley.

And—practically—he had been invited to join the Bushyager gang!

And he had been shaved. And gosh! his mother had never said a word about it. That was just like ma. She was always so good to him! And it was surely on his account that she had quit smoking!

He decided, just as he dropped off into dreamland, that he had experienced a great change. The world would never be the same again. His boyhood had passed away. Odd, what small things add up into a crisis! Perhaps a lonely, starved, poetic spirit finds inevitable crisis in its very expansion.

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER I

FREMONT AS SEEN FROM AFAR

A GROUP of Monterey County warriors sat in the little real-estate office of Captain Fillmore Ashe in Monterey Centre. Their council fire was a kerosene lamp on a pine table. Their war-paint was the pigments they were applying to the Republican machine of the county. The colors were black in the main. They did not shout in the presence of the squaws and papooses, but had pulled down the curtains closely, and spoke in low tones; for the opposing warriors might tap on the door, which opened from the pine sidewalk off the main street, and would suspect something if they found the lock turned and were denied admittance. For such a situation would ordinarily denote the observance of a mystery devoted to one of two things—the god of Tippling, or County Politics. The former would call for admission; the latter for suspicion and investigation. Our warriors desired neither.

"The fellow we've got to look out for," said Henderson L. Burns, "is Raws Upright."

"But he told me to-day," said Captain Ashe, "that he's quitting the Board of Supervisors, and is goin' into business here in the Centre."

Paul Holbrook, a young man who sat back in the corner and seemed to be learning rather than taking part, shook his head.

"Father says," he remarked, "that when Mr. Upright is going out of politics, he's the most in it."

"He says," added Captain Ashe, "that he expects to be busy on grading contracts for the new railroad. Told me so himself."

"But father says," persisted Paul Holbrook, "that he feels sure Upright is up to some schemes on county contracts."

"Jason Holbrook," said Henderson L., "is gener'ly right on what's in the wind."

"I think he knows the human factor in the county as well as any one," said Paul, Jason's son.

Paul was a rather nattily dressed young man who wore *pince-nez* glasses attached to a black ribbon. He was slender and erect, a little above the medium height, wore small and well-polished boots and carefully pressed clothes. His collars and cuffs were always fresh, and he shaved every day. One noticed the pinkness of his skin, and the rather athletic appearance of his legs and shoulders could be accounted for by the fact that he played tennis whenever he could get an opponent—which was seldom. He was the local champion at lawn croquet. He was then referred to as the dandy of the town—but it was not many years before the rough-necks had a better term for him, and dubbed him a "dude"—which word was not *in esse* in 1878, when he joined the group of warriors in Captain Ashe's office. They scarcely knew what to do with him, for he was not of their sort. He was against the County Ring, but he was not their sort. Yet he might represent Jason Holbrook,

Jason Holbrook's money and Jason Holbrook's power over a large class of people who owed money to Jason Holbrook and the banking house of Holbrook & Smythe. With Paul's Maine accent toned down toward westernism by his years at the State University, where he had graduated with honors in the classical course and in the law, his inability to avoid bookish language, his political tendencies, which allied him with the Mugwumps at about the time he was identified as a dude, and his feeling that where local politics were corrupt, the duty of the citizen was to clean them up first, he was a puzzle to his fellow-warriors in the Ashe real-estate office. He was as alien to them in his reform ideas as he was in dress and accent. They wanted to get office under the machine, and to beat the machine if they couldn't get in in any other way. But he—why, the darned ninny seemed to think you could get along without any machine!

Yet, he might help just now. He might help enough to put Captain Ashe over as clerk of the courts, and Henderson L. as county superintendent of schools. For that is the division of ambitions they had made that night. Henderson L. wanted to be clerk of the courts, too; but it was clear that if they both went out after the same office, the machine candidate would be an easy winner.

"H. L.," said the captain in his hearty way, "you an' I are makin' fools of ourselves. If we both run for clerk neither of us will git it. The other fellow'll run off with the caucuses an' the nomination."

"I can beat yeh both," said H. L.

"I c'n come a half nearer it than you can," said the captain, "an' I've got sense enough to see I can't do it."

"Wal," said H. L., "what's your proposition?"

"I'll flip a penny with yeh," said the captain, "as to which has the choice between county superintendent of schools and clerk of the courts. Anybody can run off with the superintendent nomination. And then we'll pull to-

gether. We both need office, the way real-estate hain't moving. County superintendent is better'n nothing. I've got you faded on prospects, but we've got to pull together if we beat this ring, so I'll give you an even break. Whad'ye say?"

H. L. had to go out and consult friends. He returned and, with boasts as to his generosity, agreed to the flip of the coin. Doctor Bliven, who was in their councils, said it reminded him of the two Irishmen who had been sawing wood with a crosscut saw, and were instructed by their employer to go down to the pond and saw ice when the wood was done. They went down, picked a hole in the ice to admit the saw, and then, said Pat: "Have ye a pinny, Dinnis?" "I have not," replied Dennis: "an' phwat wud ye be doin' wid a pinny?" "I want to flip it," replied Pat, "to see which of us goes below."

"Wal, Doc," said H. L., "you flip the penny. I choose heads."

The penny was flipped, and the group—Paul Holbrook was not present yet—crowded around it.

"You go under the ice," said the doctor. "It's tails!"

"Lemme look at that cent," said H. L. "It may be tails on both sides! Nope—I lost fair. I'm for you for county clerk, Cap; and as for me, I'm the leading educator of Monterey County from now henceforth. Shake, Cap!"

You think this was rather a sordid manner of determining the momentous matter of the control of the schools, the certifying of teachers, and the mental welfare of the youth of the county? Well, it was typical. And how much better is it now? As long as county superintendents are selected by popular vote, when they should be chosen, as city superintendents are or may be, from the ranks of the educators of the nation, we may about as well select the candidates by flipping coins as in any other manner. It's all chance anyhow.

And now the group of warriors about the kerosene lamp were mapping out their campaign. It was still summer; but the caucuses would be held soon. Monterey Centre was not thinking much of local politics. It was seething with excitement about its second railway, which was to be built next season. The right-of-way men were even now at work. There was to be a division headquarters with machine-shops and roundhouses at Monterey Centre. The name of the town was to be changed. No longer would the city of the future be content to bear a name signifying that it was the center of Monterey County. It was to be a railway, a jobbing and a great commercial center. It was to have paved streets. It was already making paving and building bricks, and would soon have drain-tile and other factories. It was fired with ambition to become a great manufacturing center. Vacant lots stiffened in price. Tracts adjoining the town site were platted, and henceforth the city was to be called just "Monterey." It was a dignified and sonorous name. "Monterey Centre" connoted a village: "Monterey, Iowa"—that looked cityfied. Big things were in prospect. New men were coming to the front. Taller buildings were planned. It was the beginning of a boom. But underneath, such old stagers in politics as Roswell Upright, Captain Ashe, Henderson L. Burns and Doctor Bliven, worked modestly at their old trade, instinctively feeling that the prizes of control in a growing community, would be worth planning for. So they sat about the lamp with curtains drawn, in the one-and-two-story town scheming for dominance of the city which was to be, and the county which was to become its environs.

It was a typical mid-west situation. Many new people were coming in. Huge new property values would be created. Great public contracts would be let to expend the greatly increased increment of taxation. And the new people would be unorganized. The old crowd would run things

for a long while. There would be richness—richness in office-holding, richness in litigation, richness in the contracting industry. The old flush times of the 'fifties were sure to return, but grown up, instead of in their infancy. It must be admitted that nobody understood this quite as well as Mr. Roswell Upright—but in a dim way such men as Henderson L. Burns and Captain Fillmore Ashe felt the new era in their bones. So they sat in the shabby little office and planned their campaign township by township—planned how to control the old-fashioned caucuses, which would elect delegates to the county convention, which would nominate the candidates for office.

We need not go over the whole county with them, but when they come to Crescent Township, named from its abandoned metropolis, Crescent City, down there in the bend of the river, where we saw Mark Owsley living alone after his daughter Minnie had married Claib Bushyager, we hear a familiar name or two.

"I don't believe we can get a smell in Crescent Township," said Bliven. "When the Bushyager crowd come out, they control it but they seldom come out. Never only when Raws Upright wants 'em and generally he don't need 'em there. He's got the township without 'em. Guess we'd better pass that."

"Not by a darn sight!" said H. L. "If we win, we've got to pass nothing. Le's figure on Crescent a little."

They figured long and earnestly. One had a man here whom he thought could control, another, there. They could count up enough to win with, if they would all come out promptly, if they could get the Bushyagers. But Upright had always controlled them. Some one suggested to Paul Holbrook that certain men who were known to be indebted to his father ought to be made to see the light. Paul blushed at the implication. He said he would speak to these men on the public interests involved—of which he was becoming

increasingly doubtful—but he could not, of course, use any coercion on them. Doctor Bliven asked Captain Ashe aside what in hell Paul thought they had asked him in for. Paul said he wished they could avoid any indebtedness to such a group as the Bushyagers. It was almost openly stated that they were a gang of horse-thieves, and certain disappearances of men who had carried money were spoken of in connection with their activities. Of course, he was speaking in confidence. He realized that there was no proof against these questionable characters. But they were questionable.

"The main thing," said Captain Ashe, "is that they're questionable in this campaign. I don't see that we can ask a certif'cate of character from the voters we canvass. Raws Upright wun't. . . . Say, boys—you may think this a fool idea, but I know a boy that knows these Bushyagers a darned sight better'n Upright does. And while he is only jest of age, an' never mixed in politics, he might get the Bushyagers for us."

"Who is he?" they asked.

"Fremont McConkey," was the reply. "Old Al McConkey's second boy. You all know him."

"Yes," said H. L. "Teaches school. Reads Bob Ingersoll."

"Reads everything," said Captain Ashe. "Don't make friends much—only with boys you'd think he wouldn't cotton to. The good hard-workin' fellers don't seem to interest him, and he hunts with Foster Blake's good-for-nothing Bill, and fishes with Bent Bushyager. Elder Skeels is kind o' worried about it. The fiddlers tell me he goes to dances sometimes, but never takes a girl, an' is liable to mosey off into the night jest when the others git goin' good, as if he was kind o' fed up. Used to herd cattle over back of the Finster place with Bent when they was boys. I do' know what to think of young McConkey. Seems a good boy, at

that, and *smart!* W'y, when I sold his father that land Fremont come to my house, a little ragged young one, an' my girls talk yet of the things he said. He took us to a Fourth-of-July celebration once when my horse took sick over by their place, an' you'd 'a' thought we had a lecturer with us a part of the time, and the rest of the trip he hadn't a word to throw to a dog. He'll be something, but what?"

"Say," said H. L., "you spoke of the Bushyagers. Old Deek Owsley come in the other day and talked like he'd take out seventy-five hundred life insurance with me. Old Deek!"

"Did!" was the astonished rejoinder of the captain. "Why, he talked like he'd want five thousand with me! But he wouldn't close."

"Wouldn't sign up with me, either," said H. L. "Just took the medical examination, and talked around. Funny! In favor of his daughter Minnie, Claib's wife?"

"Yes," said the captain, "I wonder what it means? Some trick, you bet!"

"Well," said Doctor Bliven, "I don't care what it means. Shall we try to line up this McConkey prodigy to line up the Bushyagers? If you ask me, I'll say it ain't worth while."

"Suppose we leave it to Cap," said H. L.

"Prairie chickens are thick on the Gowdy land," said the captain. "I guess I'll go out soon on a chicken-shoot! An' I'll call on him. He used to teach the Vandemark School and ought to be strong with the folks there, in a way. He can't do us any harm. The question is, will it pay to bother with him. If he could git Foster Blake's crowd to come across the Vandemark Slew on caucus night—an' git there early—we might take that in, too. An' Old Jake Vandemark always talks well of Fremont, too. I guess he likes Freem better'n he does Henry, but is satisfied to have Henry marry his girl, because we know what Henry will do. Fremont

is an off-ox, an' off-oxen don't make good husbands lots of times. All right, I'll look Freem over. Le's talk about Willow Township now."

Probably no better sketch of Fremont's development or lack of it, in the four years since that eventful Fourth of July period can be given—if one knows the boy, as I hope the reader does—than this aloof but interested estimate of him by these crass politicians. Only they do not know or have not mentioned, the hard times suffered by the McConkeys, the bad crops, the struggle of Kate McConkey to eke out the family funds with turkey money and butter money; the constant need of the family for Fremont's earnings as a teacher; of his new ventures into whatever reading matter he could find; of the resolve he has just made now that he is of age, that, unless the family all get sick again, as they did last winter and fall, he will save his money and go to the State University, or to Cornell College at Mount Vernon. They have seen him in the distance, a dim equivocal figure, as he was to almost every one but his mother, and they have decided to make use of him if possible, in the strange drama which we call self-government. I wonder how he will work into it, and what rôle he will play?

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN ASHE GOES AFTER GAME

A GIRL is a child in January, and a woman in December. She unfolds like a flower. Her blossoming is almost visible. She is one thing at fourteen, and quite another at sixteen. Her brother has a similar emergence from the chrysalis of childhood; but it is slower, less perceptible. One can never say of a boy, he was a child just now; and he is a man! But between the years of sixteen and twenty-one the change takes place, and it is these years in the life of Fremont McConkey which have passed between the time when he asked Dorinda Doughty "to go with him," and the day when Captain Fillmore Ashe went out to take him chicken shooting, and to "line him up" as his supporter for the office of clerk of the courts.

You think it shows guile on the captain's part that Winifred sits with him on the seat of the roomy old covered carriage with the captain's red setter at their feet—but you are mistaken. Winifred is there because she said she was tired of Monterey Centre, where nothing ever happened, and wanted to see the farms and grass and flowers; and she could drive the horse when her father was out in the stubble shooting. She never mentioned Fremont, either by his Ashe-family name of the neatherd or clodhopper, or otherwise. Yet, she knew of him as one of the objectives of the trip. Her father had mentioned it to her. Catherine, always busy with her household matters, and May, who had

lessons, knew only that their father was going out in the country again, and pretended he was going shooting. There was a mystery in all these country wanderings. Captain Ashe's candidacy had not yet been announced—not in his family, at least.

You will at first glance scarcely find Fremont changed. He is only a shade taller—and goodness knows he was tall enough in 1874. His face is still smooth from Sunday's shaving, but is almost as fair and pink as ever. He stoops a little, but his figure has grown more manly, and his voice has lost the deep croak of the hobbledehoy, and become resonant. And he looks better to the eyes of Captain Ashe, if not to Winifred's, because he does not wear his best clothes. He is plowing. And he is feeling rather contented with himself and the world.

He was out this morning early, with three horses and a sixteen-inch plow, turning down the stubble in straight brown furrows a quarter of a mile long. The oats which had shattered from the harvested crop, had sprouted, and with the stubble and weeds he was turning down little plots of delightfully green wool with tender white rootlets which softly crackled as the mold-board split them at its sharp junction with the land-side of the plow. There was no such thing as a stone or a stump to divert the plow from its straight path. He had a chain of iron attached to the beam, and to the end of the double-tree, and this chain, always on the point of being plowed under, but ever escaping burial by a fraction of an inch, bore down every straw and weed and left the plowed fields as clean as if nothing had ever grown upon that soil. It was soil transformed. When he reached the corner of his land, the steel plow, polished as bright as the brightest mirror, was deftly twitched to throw the last foot of the furrow over, and as the horses came promptly about, it was accurately thrown so as to catch its exact inches of land on the next tack, and as the horses

eased into their collars, Fremont looked back at his straight furrows, each a little drier than the last, until it came to the first turned this morning, the whole number of fresh ridges being a beautifully-placed exhibit of the work he had done that morning. Here was something definite accomplished. So many furrows turned to be frozen and thawed by winter, buried in snow, sown in spring, and reaped next year; and so many mouths fed somewhere, so many hands released from the plow and enabled to clothe and shelter and educate and enthrall by some art the great developing world. Fremont never plowed but he felt the claim of the soil upon him. He never hauled a load of wheat to market without feeling a part of that claim cancelled.

The one was poetry; the other prose.

He was so mildly exalted by the idyllic task, the blue haze that wrapped the far horizon, the white clouds that were slowly drifting across the blue sky, the fields with their tent-shaped stacks awaiting the thrashing machines, the other fields still dotted with shocks, the tasseled cornfields, so much broader and more numerous than one would have seen four years before, and the cows standing in the shade of the elms and willows and cottonwoods and Lombardy poplars on that side of their barbed-wire pasture which lay next the grove, that the horses had to inform him that it was noon. This they did by loud whinnyings when they reached the corner where they expected to be unhitched. He looked at the sun, corroborated it by a glance at his watch, and unhitched.

"You know, don't you, old fellows!" said he as he gently slapped their thighs to make them stand over. "Instinct or reason? Anyhow, oats——and rest! Giddap!"

Captain Ashe's carriage was just stopping in the McConkey yard, as Fremont's horses lifted their heads from the watering-trough, letting the cool water drizzle back

from their lips into the tank. Winifred bowed. Fremont did something which he had never done before—he removed his broad, dusty felt hat, with a rather graceful sweep in response to her bow. Taking off one's hat thus for the first time, requires initiative. His reading had made it clear that it ought to be done, but nobody did it in Monterey County, so far as he knew. Any of the country girls would laugh at a boy who would do such a thing. It took a new situation to justify such an innovation—and it took nerve. Winifred rather liked it. His dust was excused as he stood there by his horses, with the hat in his hand, and the skin on his forehead dazzlingly white above the sunburn of his face—as white as the "thkin" May had seen that first day through the hole in his "panths," because he had on no "gawies."

"Any prairie chickens around here?" asked the captain, after greetings. "Thought I'd come out an' see."

"Lots of 'em," said Fremont. "But you must put up your horses and have dinner with us. It's just ready. Here comes ma to ask you. No use protesting. Do you feed corn or oats?"

He was rather glad to be relieved by his mother; for his reading had not advised him as to what one does with his hat after doffing it. It is removed as a token of reverence, subjection, allegiance, because it is not a fitting thing for a gentleman to be covered in the presence of a lady; but all these arguments imply that it is to be kept off—a thing clearly impracticable. But when can it be put back on, unless the lady in language of the kings he read of should say graciously, "Be covered!" It would be far less trouble to be a boor. One had had so much more practise. Winifred thought that he had changed greatly from the little boy who bit his bread into horseshoes; forgetting that he had not eaten with his knife!

The change in Fremont was, as might have been ex-

pected, in the direction of maturity; but it was a different maturity from what that acute student of personalities would have expected in a country school-teacher. His pronunciation was more like that of the principal of the Monterey High School, who was an importation from the East. When the conversation strayed to such approaches to philosophy as the company made, it was Fremont who waded into deep water, and blushingly waded out as he observed that their town company seemed no more at home in it than the family. Neither did they rally to his support when he mentioned Dickens and Thackeray. The McConkey family, too, had changed. Abbie and Henry had married and gone out in the growing Iowa world for themselves. Sarah was a lively young woman who played General Persifor F. Smith's Grand March on the cabinet organ—a great feat. Frank had reached the stage between boy and man, and was a reduced facsimile of what Fremont had been at his age, physically and apparently, mentally. But the member of the family who took up the ball in literature and discussion generally when it was put in play by Fremont, was Mrs. McConkey, winning thereby the high respect of Winifred, in spite of the elder lady's ungrammatical speech as she disposed of Bob Ingersoll's Mistakes of Moses—which she did with a sort of defiant glance at Fremont.

It was a good dinner. There were eggs, and pork and beans, and rhubarb pie, and preserves and jellies, and a roll jelly-cake. The fruits of the earth had come to the settlers with the years of settlement. The era of bran bread was ancient history. Corn and dairying and forage crops and hogs had partly ended the era of wheat and its blight and rusts. Money was scarce, but, after all, in everything else, it was becoming a time of plenty. Mrs. McConkey and Sarah were not ashamed of the meal which these unexpected guests found on their table, and were distinctly proud of the fact that they were able to put

napkins on the table in their honor, and that Frank and Fremont, at least, knew how to tuck them into their neck-bands just like city folks—and they had four-tined forks with which it was possible to perform what Fremont called in the jocularity of the family circle, "the act of prehension." Altogether, it was a successful affair, and when Captain Ashe said that he owed Fremont an obligation for the time he took them to Crabapple Grove, and would like to have him add to it by going shooting with him, and using a breech-loader he had brought along, Mr. McConkey said that he would make a hand at the plow, and Fremont could go.

All that old boyish, feverish foolishness about girls was over, Fremont had often told himself; and he had come to see that Dorinda Doughty had never been what his fancy painted her; but the carriage was narrow, and when Winifred sat partly on his lap, and partly on her father's, prattling so innocently about the flowers Fremont had gathered for her "when they had their buggy-ride," and how the shadows of the clouds "walked like widows clothed in weeds" over the prairie that Fourth of July so long ago, Fremont began to see what a wonderful girl she was, and what a kinship there was between her soul and his. To have her seated so calmly on his lap! It was incredible. No wonder he missed the first two chickens the red setter flushed.

"Not used to the gun," said the captain. "Do better next time!"

"I never saw a breech-loader before," explained Fremont.

"These are the only two in Monterey Centre," said the captain. "Some think that the regular gun shoots better. Got a firmer foundation for your powder and shot. I do' know,—I got one out of two shots that time, anyhow."

Fremont walked behind the red setter in a character-

istic frame of mind. He was closely observant of the dog; he carefully marked down the covey they had flushed; he carried his gun carefully, and was ready for the next shot; but at the same time, in this, his first experience of shooting over the dogs, he was out grouse-shooting with Sir Fillmore Ashe on the Scottish moor, or with Squire Ashe of Ashcroft having a go at the pheasants in the Midlands of England. That buggy over there was a dog-cart in which Lady Winifred Ashe was coming with the servants and the luncheon, which would be eaten at the ruined Abbey—those conical objects over in the north. They were not wheat stacks at all, but crumbling towers of the Abbey. Over that knoll were the gamekeepers and the beaters. After they had got their quota of birds, they would gather in the great dining hall at Ashcroft Towers, where Lord Ashe had his country-seat, and after dressing, they would have a ceremonious dinner, and he would meet Lady Winifred in the dark arbor and woo her to let him take her to Scotland to be the Lady of McConkey Manor—and there either the unpoetical name, or the fact that the setter was frozen to a statue on a new scent, caused the boy to cease his application of his reading to the raw state of Iowa, and step close up to take the first bird that rose, as Captain Ashe told him to do.

It rose twenty-five yards in front of the dog's nose, with a whir like a tornado, and with a powerful rolling, shaking motion went diagonally across the sky like a projectile, and straightened out for its flight, when Fremont's gun spoke; and his bird fell as if it had reached the end of a stretched cord, rebounded, and lay—dead. The captain's piece had cracked in his ear before the roaring of his own ears had ceased, and three more birds burst from the stubble, one of them almost under the dog's nose. It shot off toward the captain's side, and Fremont, waiting a moment for him, took it at sixty yards in a splendid shot. His

old experience in walking up his prairie chickens without a dog, and of shooting ducks and geese with Bill Blake had stood him in good stead. The captain missed with his second barrel. When Fremont saw him break his gun, and shove in two more shells, he followed suit. The dog still stood at point. The captain walked up and encouraged the setter to go on, and Fremont followed, his heart beating until it almost suffocated him. This was sport! The last of the covey rose ahead, and again Fremont, his confidence in himself restored, killed his birds, while the captain missed one, and saw the other halt and dip as it felt the charge, and fall far off over a low hill.

"We'll get him!" said the captain, as they gathered up their kill. "Say, boy, you certainly do nail 'em! I like to hunt with a man that can shoot—and you can, I'll take my oath!"

"It was luck," said Fremont.

Winifred, beckoned to by her father, drove up, and the game was put in the carriage.

"It looks to me," said she, "as if you're not getting your share, pa. Found some one that can beat you?"

"That ain't hard to do," said the captain. "But I may get a lunch while Fremont's gettin' a full meal. Where did that hurt bird fall? I hate to leave 'em to suffer, even if we could get more by going after the live ones."

Ah! If Fremont had not been misled by the slavish attitude of his literature toward the British writers, he might have realized that he was engaged in the finest sport in which men and dogs ever engaged. He was not shooting the half tame birds of the Old World, nor those enervated by domestic feeding. These birds were wild and strong. They had a chance for their lives. And all this is over, now. I can still hear the guns after harvest, as I write this, but the sportsman who bags as many in a whole day as Fremont and Captain Ashe have already in the

buggy, boasts of it all the rest of the year. The prairie grass is disappearing in Monterey County now, and the prairie-hen must have prairie grass in which to nest. Where there is a section of prairie sod the cattle pasture it close, and trample the nests under foot. The pinnated grouse must follow the bison into tradition. And I remember when Absalom Frost made the choleric remark which I have not forgotten to this day, that a man ought to be prosecuted who would shoot a hawk.

"They keep the prairie chicken stirred up, anyhow," said he. "And if something don't bother them chickens a little, they'll have all my corn eat off the cobs before I can gather it!"

The prairie chickens were actually a pest, when the cornfields were small and far apart in Iowa, and the birds came in from the open prairie in myriads. We used to trap them in pens made of laths. We thought the man who helped fill a railway car with them in winter, to be shipped to Chicago and New York and Philadelphia, was doing a good work. And now, when I happen, on some still April morning, to hear that marvelous booming note of the wooing cock, it transports me to dreamland. It brings the prairie before my mind as it used to be—burned black by the prairie fire, with little lofty whirlwinds of ashes springing up, aspiring to heaven, and dying down; then tenderly green with the springing grass; then dotted with anemones peering from the snow, blued with bird's-foot violets on the dry hillsides, zigzagged by the lightning-like shadows of flitting gophers, darkened with the lush grasses of the hollows, spangled with wild pinks, yellow puccoon and orange lilies, laced with clear little brooks, brooded over by skies that shame any scenery of the sea, darkened by thundergust all spread abroad to the sight over the low horizon, dotted here and there by a little town so puny in comparison with its ambitions, broken occasionally by the fur-

row and the sprouting trees of a farm poverty-stricken in comparison with the richness of its soil, seared by the bitter blizzards—and then the blackening fires which followed the silvery freshets of spring; and again the tender grass, with the prairie chicken's gong as an undertone to the clamor of wild-fowl.

And there is Fremont McConkey, sitting in the shadow of a wheat stack, while Captain Ashe talks to him, burning to be a writer, taught by every one in speech and printed page that he is outside the realm of "material" for literature—and with all this in his memory and experience!

"They're going to have something new at the Centre this fall," said he. "A Teachers' Institute."

"Heard about it," replied the captain. "Henderson L. Burns thinks it's a good idea. They're talking of nominating him for county superintendent. Goin' to this here Institute?"

"I want to," answered Fremont. "But it's a long way to ride back and forth and attend classes."

"I'll tell you what you do," said the captain, who had not found his way as yet to talk of the caucuses with this strangely-impressive boy. "You come right to our house an' stay with us!"

Fremont looked over at Winifred, as she sat leaning back against the butts of the sheaves.

"Please do," she urged. "I know Cathie would be glad to have you. She remembers you and often speaks of you. It won't be a bit like having a stranger—not after to-day!"

Was Fremont interested in politics—public affairs, you know? It was the captain who asked this, after Fremont had tentatively agreed to be the guest of the Ashes during the Institute. Yes, he read a good deal about what was going on.

"But you're of age, now," said the captain, "and a voter.

Now I'd like to know how you feel about clerk of the courts in this county. I have thought—some people have asked me to run for that office. Now a man that expects to be in county politics will do well if he will take the bright young men into his councils—young fellows like you. They may not be in control, but they will be in a few years. Why, there's no reason why in a mighty few years, you shouldn't have the best office in the county; and the way to work toward it is to take an interest. For your own good, you know. And to help your friends that you think might make good officers, you know."

Any boy who had in solitude and secrecy harbored as many and diverse ambitions as had Fremont McConkey, would have been flattered by this frank recognition of the fact that he was an exceptional chap. But he could not see for the life of him how he could help any one to get a nomination. He did not know how it was done. He had heard of caucuses and conventions, but no McConkey had ever taken part in one. I advise the reader to consider the fact. It shows better than any description I can give that Fremont belonged to a family that somehow did not belong. It was out of it. It was not reckoned as any important part of this epochal matter in which these settlers and their children engaged—no less a matter than that of building a great commonwealth in a generation or so. I have read that an observer with a magnifying-glass can actually see the growth of a shoot of the tropical bamboo as cell develops from cell to lengthen the enormous spear of grass as the forces of nature fling it up toward the sky. In a more impressive way we in Iowa in those great days could actually see the movement of the burgeoning of a magnificent social and political tree in our wonderful experiment in state building. Such men as Captain Ashe were the terminal cells, and thought they were the growth. People like the McConkeys made up the trunk

which upheld it, but were not active even under the microscope. Fremont was in process of initiation among those who made up the tip of the twig. He was a new cell forming. Captain Ashe was watching him as he formed. He had already placed Fremont under obligations to him by taking him on this shooting excursion, by inviting him to stop with the family when the Institute opened, by treating him as an equal.

The game looked rather interesting to Fremont, as Captain Ashe explained to him how the delegates were selected who made up the conventions which governed the nation. He saw it only as it applied to the county. It seemed an interesting game. There might be literary material in it—if the surroundings were only more what literature required, as they were where Mr. Veneering went to Parliament for Pocket Breeches (Fremont had *Our Mutual Friend* and had read it to rags). But the setting was only this raw Iowa, and of course would not do. Cooper or Hawthorne would never write of such things—but they were interesting all the same.

"You see," said the captain—Winifred had gone off looking for those wild roses which bloom in autumn in the stubble—"we've got to upset the machine that old Raws Upright has got in every township. We've got to get enough voters to the caucuses to surprise 'em, and run off with the delegation. It's got to be a still hunt here in your township, and in Vandemark Township. Now in Vandemark Township, you stand in with the Blake crowd, don't you?"

"Well," said Fremont, "I don't know."

"Foster Blake thinks you're the smartest boy in the county. You was always a friend of his boy, wasn't you?"

"Yes," said Fremont. It was the first time that his friendship for Bill had ever been regarded as an asset.

"Well," went on the captain, "I believe I can get Uncle

Jake Vandemark and his friends. Now the Blake crowd don't generally git to caucuses on account of Vandemark's Folly Slew."

"I hear," said Fremont, "that Uncle Jake has made the new railroad agree to drain that slew; and that this will make dry land of Plum Pudd'n Pond."

"Yes," said the captain, "and it'll make Uncle Jake a rich man, too. He'll have eight hundred acres of plow land, the richest in the county. But it won't git the Blakes across for the caucus this year. Suppose you could stir 'em up, without anybody knowin' it, an' have 'em come to the caucus? With them and Uncle Jake and a few more friends I got, we could take that delegation away from the Upright gang."

"How—how do you do such things?" asked Fremont, blushing.

"Oh, jest go over a few days before the caucus, an' talk with the fellows that will come with their friends, and keep still beforehand."

"How do they run a caucus?" asked Fremont, blushing again.

"Well," said the captain, "the chairman is generally a feller selected by Old Raws Upright. He's a farmer or some one in the little town that's a road supervisor or something. He must call the meeting to order. He has a few that he fixes so they'll be there at the time set in the call. If there's a fight on, an' he's got a majority of his men there when the clock strikes, he calls the meetin' to order, an' they elect their delegates to the county convention right off the bat, an' when any one else comes in afterward, the thing's all over, an' they exchange plugs of tobacco or smoke cigars sent out by the candidates, an' laugh at the fellers that's late, an' go home. That's a kind of a snap judgment, but all regular an' nobody can complain. Jest having the precinct chairman and him holdin' the

watch controls politics, from path-master to president of the United States."

It was a great game, Fremont was beginning to think. It was a change from this everlasting reading, reading, reading, and trying to write. What became of the will of the people was a question which flashed through his mind, but he put it by. He was studying phenomena now, not drawing conclusions.

"And what does the chairman do," asked Fremont, "if he hasn't a majority when the clock strikes?"

"Well," said the captain, "that depends on what kind of a feller he is. Some of 'em don't have the nerve to do anything but just call her to order and git skinned. But if the chairman is one of Raws' tried and true, he says something about not wantin' to take a snap judgment, an' waitin' until they all git in, an' when some go away, an' more of his friends come, he finds a time when he can call the meetin' to order an' run it."

"Awaits the psychological moment," suggested Fremont.

"Whatever that means," replied the captain. "But there's no moment like the time when the minute-hand reaches the hour if you've got the chairman an' the votes."

"I believe," said Fremont, after setting down a few names, "that we can get the delegation from this and Vandemark Township. You know I've been teaching in these two townships since I was sixteen."

"Good," said the captain—for up to this time he had been all at sea as to whether Fremont would act or not; and had been calling himself a fool for spending so much time on him when he could have been seeing more influential men. "I can count on you, can I?"

"For what I can do," answered Fremont.

"Shake!" said the captain, offering his hand.

"With me, too," said Winifred, who had walked up.

"You know, Mr. McConkey, all the Ashe family are counting on your help!"

"It doesn't amount to much," said Fremont, "but what there is of it, you are welcome to."

He was holding her hand, and thinking of what a sensation it would cause if he would kiss it, as Sir Fremont McConkey would, of course, kiss the hand of Lady Winifred Ashe. She wondered why he clung to it, and rather quickly took it away.

Her father had carefully left his most important affair for an afterthought. He was not so solicitous about Willow and Vandemark Townships, for he thought he had a rather good prospect in each of them without Fremont's help. It was Crescent Township where he was lost without the intervention of some new agency. So he divided his game with Fremont, and drove away, out through the gate, and stopped in the road. Fremont followed to see what had caused the halt.

"I have just happened to think," began the captain slowly, "about Crescent Township. You're well acquainted in Crescent Township?"

"No-o-o," answered Fremont. "I don't know that I am."

"The Bushyager folks," said the captain, dextrously avoiding the word "gang" by which they were more and more coming to be known, "have got a swad of votes—for a small caucus like that. An' they're kind of outsiders. Don't take much interest, gener'ly. Raws Upright can gener'ly git 'em—but any one that's a friend o' theirs, might—you're close to some of 'em, ain't you?"

Fremont thought a moment. He remembered that Bent Bushyager had once practically invited him to "come in and be one of us" and know about "everything"—with a warning that if he didn't do that the less "pryin' around he did the better for him." And he had gone spearing

fish with them rather often. But "close to them"? He scarcely liked to admit that.

"I might talk to some of them," he said at last. "But I don't know how much good it would do."

"Ain't many that can talk to 'em—as friends," said the captain. "I'll tell you what you do. You do what you can. I'll drive around this way once in a while, and we'll act together in this. I'll tell you who we've got in Vandemark and Willow that you can depend on in a quiet kind of way, an' you can feel the Bushyagers out, an' tell me how the land lays."

The captain drove on in silence for half a mile or so.

"Well," said he at last, "we've had a good hunt, anyhow; but I guess I've fooled a day away as fur as votes are concerned. The clodhopper is too green f'r my uses."

"He beat you shooting, anyhow," said Winifred. "And he doesn't act so green—to me."

"Green as grass!" replied the captain. "An' now, Winnie, you've be'n let into some secrets. Don't talk if you can help it. Can a girl keep from it?"

"A girl can keep a secret as well as any one," said Winnie. "You'll see!"

Fremont stood in the road thinking. Mainly he was thinking of Winifred. He could still feel the thrill in the spot where her plump form had rested on his lap. He stroked it with his hand. And then the thought came to him that by the proper management a surprise could be arranged in all three of these townships. If he could hold back a few votes so that they could come into the caucus at a prearranged signal, just after the chairman had called the caucuses to order thinking he had a majority—why, it was perfectly simple. It was exactly what he would make a hero do in a story. And especially with the Bushyager votes in Crescent Township. He did not foresee, however, the new course of action upon which he was entering as

affecting his own life, nor the consequences of making Roswell Upright an enemy of the Bushyagers. Nor of its consequence to the community. It was years before he saw it, even after the event.

CHAPTER III

A FISHER OF MEN

FREMONT became a mystery to his family. He was not as "faithful" a worker on the farm as formerly. He did not turn over to his father the wages—they called it that—which he earned in his last term of school. To be sure, he was doing much more than half a man's work on the farm in these fine autumn days, but his father shook his head as Fremont began taking "the light team" and the buggy for evening drives, and gave no explanation.

"Wal," said he to his wife, "that's the way! He's of age now. You toil and slave to raise a boy, an' as soon as the law allows, off he goes an' he's no more good to yeh!"

"You've got no call to talk like that about your children," replied Mrs. McConkey. "Who earnt the money you bought this place with, if it wa'n't Fremont an' Henry, herdin' cattle on the prairie in heat an' cold, storm an' shine? An' Frank is just as good a boy as they was. As fur as that goes, what would we have done in the house if it hadn't be'n for Abbie an' Sarah? I couldn't 've stood the racket—harvest hands, thrashin' crews, milk, butter, scrubbin' after the mud of a lot of dirty tramps and all that. What would we have done when we all had typhoid fever one after another an' by twos an' threes last year, if it hadn't be'n for Fremont's school money? Are we goin' to ask our children to stay by us an' never go out for themselves, as John Doughty does—an' Dorinda lookin' like

a woman of forty right now! You better think back a little before you complain, Alvin!"

"Wal," said Alvin, "all that don't make it easier to hire a reg'lar hand through the rest o' the plowin' and the corn huskin'. But I suppose I might as well hire Owen Thorkelson or Gowdy, or whatever you call him."

"He calls himself Gowdy," said Mrs. McConkey, "but it seems more decent-like to call him Thorkelson. Well, they say he's a good hand. An' have him bring his fiddle along, so Sarah can learn to play accompaniments. An' I wouldn't find much fault with Fremont. He's hurt deep when he's hurt at all."

Fremont was absorbed in his new task of doing something outside of the realms of books and dreams. He was actually working on the materials of Institutions. He was on the lowest rungs of statesmanship—endeavoring to mold a community's collective action. And though he had read every history, every book on civil government, every great political oration, every biography, every poem and every novel he had been able to lay his hands on, and though for years he had been teaching the young of the vicinity, he was forced to do this new work with no preparation, without any previous thought, and under the tutelage of Captain Fillmore Ashe, whose sole object was to get for himself the Republican nomination for clerk of the District and Circuit Courts. I wonder if we shall ever have the wisdom to train the children in local politics as we do in geography and arithmetic, and to show them the practical inside of things by making them do a good deal of the work of our public offices as a part of their school drill. Thus we should make every school an Experiment Station in Politics. We should have to keep things clean so that the children might not be infected with political corruption. And no boy would do as Fremont McConkey is doing before our eyes, working out problems like those Mark Twain

said a mining-town teacher set for his pupils, in whisky, and mortalities in shooting affrays and the like, instead of apples and marbles. But Fremont's teacher was not to blame. He was setting Fremont all the copies there were. Perhaps we shall have to wait until the women vote—not that I believe they ever will—before we shall train the children in politics, just as we now do in the three "R's."

It surprised Fremont to see that he could talk to men older than himself, and sway their action. It startled him to realize that in three townships he had what looked like a good organization, of which nobody seemed to suspect the existence; and not only an effective, but what to his nature was more important, because more interesting, a dramatic way of using his organization. In the meantime he had not seen Captain Ashe. He covered his territory evenings and Sundays; he rather prided himself on what he had done, and he wanted to talk to some one about it. And one day as he was still working at the great task which lasted from harvest to the freezing of the earth, the fall plowing, he saw a horse and buggy turning off the road and coming across the furrows to him. With a talent for secrecy which had perhaps been developed in him by his secret life of thought and dream, he stopped his plow in a hollow where he would be out of sight, and sat down on his plow-beam and waited. It looked, he said as the rig drew nearer, like a woman. It *was* a woman! And when the rig halted in the stubble beside him he could scarcely credit his senses—it was Winifred Ashe.

He felt a strange feeling of joy and adventure as she looked down at him with a heavenly smile—a thrill which filled him, and seemed almost to burst his fingers' ends—a satisfaction that his work had brought her back to him—a realization that Winifred was the one to whom he wanted to talk. He had not thought of it before, but she, who had been present when he had enlisted in the great war, was the

one for whom he had really been working. And here she was to give him commands and receive his report. It never once occurred to him that this was the most unlikely thing imaginable.

"How do you do, Mr. McConkey?" He wished she had called him Fremont—and he was glad she had not. "I am a politician to-day. Papa has to give me things to do to keep me from talking. I know he's sorry he let me know what you are doing, but he can't help it now, can he?"

What a divine laugh she had! Fremont sought for a proper reply.

"When I am in his place," said he, "I shall ask nothing better than to have you manage my campaign!"

"I'll do it," said she. "Is that a bargain? Then let's shake hands on it!"

She let him hold her hand a little longer than on that former occasion. One wonders whether it was not because her father was not looking on. In fact, he held it this time until the embarrassment was his, and he dropped it rather awkwardly. She immediately used the hand in rummaging in a hand-bag for a letter, which she handed to him. It was from her father. He explained to Fremont that he was busy night and day, but was depending on Fremont in Vandemark, Willow and Crescent Townships. And truly he was, so far as he depended on any one; but really he had now no idea of carrying any one of these precincts, by Fremont's aid or otherwise. But it was worth a trip on Winifred's part and the writing of a letter.

"You must be tired, following that plow all day," said she. "Sit in the buggy with me and tell me what to say to papa."

I shall not tell you how wise Winifred was in all the lore of the great issue; nor how profound her wisdom seemed to Fremont, nor how he searched his memory after-

And here she was to give him commands and receive his report.

ward for the pearls of wisdom she let fall, nor how vainly; nor how she clapped her hands, and then seized with both of hers his brown plowman's paw and squeezed it in delight; nor how he captured her hands and pressed them fervently as he conjured her not to tell her father of his plan, but just to say to him that he believed with the names the captain had given him, there was a good chance in Willow and Vandemark, and possibly in Crescent, though that was so far away he had not worked it up fully as yet. But he was going to Crescent City Sunday night to spear fish with a crowd with whom he hoped to do something. He had to press her hands to impress upon her the desirability of their keeping the methods of controlling these precincts a secret.

"Just between you and me?" she queried, her face flushed divinely, and her hair just a little disarranged in what had been almost a struggle—it was so necessary to impress her, you know!

"Yes," said he, "let it be our secret!"

"How splendid!" said she. "And when it is all over, we can brag of it, can't we?"

"Yes," said Fremont.

"Le's brag of it now!" said she. "I think you are the smartest boy I know! Nobody would have thought of such a thing but you! And nobody would have kept the secret but me! And we pulled papa through, didn't we?"

Ah, this Ashe family were wonderful people, thought Fremont. How frankly the captain had come to him, taken him chicken-shooting as one man of affairs with another, and relied on him to pull him through! And now to send this wonderful girl to him! What a great new world this was of which he was getting his first glimpse!

"But Sunday night!" she finally said, almost reproachfully. "Ought you to go Sunday night?"

"Don't be distressed," said he. "It will be Monday

morning, in the wee small hours before I do anything on your father's matter."

"I shall lie awake," said she, "and when the clock strikes one, I shall think of you"—here she paused, and added, "laying plans with those people for us! But do you see how low the sun is? You mustn't keep a little girl out so she'll get lost in the dark, must you?"

She solved the problem of taking her leave of him from their so-long-occupied seat in the buggy, by pretending to be a man, and stepping out, offering him her hand, and aiding him as a lady to alight. She laughed merrily. She said that "mum" was the word, and laid her finger on her lip, after which he took it and laid it on his to seal their compact—and then she went away.

Frank McConkey passed through the field that evening, and saw where Fremont's horses had stood a long, long time in the hollow digging pits with their hoofs by stamping flies, and where a single horse to a buggy had stood making similar excavations in the stubble. He noticed also that Fremont had done a very insignificant half day's work—and yet he had been late to supper. Fremont was a mystery—more and more a mystery. It was a mystery for him to be so wakeful that night, though he must know he needed his sleep, if he was going to be up all night fishing with the Bushyagers. It was not a mystery to Frank why he should go fishing, even with these fellows, for to Frank's mind, fishing was its own justification. Others disagreed with Frank in this matter.

"Go fishin' with yeh? Shore I will!" said Bent Bushyager, when Fremont appeared at the Bowie Bushyager farm, down in the edge of the timber near the river in the middle of that eventful Sunday afternoon. "I'll leave my girl any time to go off with you. But it's too cold to wade, you know. We'll go down to the railroad bridge and snare a few."

Down they went through that beautiful mantle of woodland which nature spread over the valleysides of the Iowa rivers. There was a path which might have been made by a tribe of Indians, its gradients were so easy—and perhaps it had been. Or by buffalo and deer. Nothing is more permanent in a land of living beings, than a path—nor in individual or social life. It is the Easiest Way. Follow out that suggestion, and you have the key to history, and morals. This path gradually dropped to the floor of the river-bottom and skirted the edge of it, passing here and there the mouth of a ravine down which the water of dry runs in freshet and spring runs at all times, fell from the prairie hinterland into the stream. Sitting at the mouth of one of these as Bent and Fremont passed along, was a slender, sinewy, weathered youngish-looking man whom Fremont had never seen. He was dusty as if from travel, and had on his clothes the horsehairs and dust, and on the inside of his trousers legs that drab, rubbed-in powder which told Fremont as plainly as I hope these words have told you, that his travel had been on horseback.

"Hello," said he, as the two young men approached him, "either of youse live fur about hyar?"

"I make out to sometimes," said Bent.

Fremont noted an exchange of glances between them which he remembered. Evidently they did not know each other. Equally evident was the fact that there was some exchange of ideas between them, in the usual manner of greeting each other. One gets these things by a sort of primal instinct. Yet, what followed was quite ordinary.

"If you're acquainted with the lay o' the land, I'd take it kind if you'd show me whur to git back on the main road west," said the stranger.

"You go on to the bridge," said Bent, handing the fish-pole and line to Fremont, "an' I'll show this stranger the

way, an' foller the track to the bridge from below. I wun't be long."

He walked up the dark ravine with the stranger, following what seemed a very dim path. Fremont strolled on a short distance and then stopped and listened. He heard the low voices of Bent and the stranger as they climbed the ravine—and presently he heard the whinnying of two or three horses, and the voice of a third man who seemed to be rather profanely seeking to quiet the animals. And then all was still. Fremont walked on to the bridge wondering. He wondered as he fished all by himself—wondered how any one could miss the "main road west" in this country which now had houses along every road; why two men with horses could wander down into that secluded ravine; how the stranger came to be sitting beside this bypath through the Bushyager woods; and what there was between Bent and the man who asked if either of them "lived fur about here." And finally he wondered if Bent were coming back. He had snared several red-horse, a black bass and two wall-eyed pike before he heard Bent's voice, and looking up, saw him peering down over the ends of the railway ties in search of Fremont.

"What luck?" asked Bent.

"Pretty good," replied Fremont. "But the sun's gone behind the hill, and it's getting too dark. I'm quitting. I want to talk with you, anyhow. I'm coming up."

They walked up along the track together, Bent seeming unusually reticent, as if he was suspicious of Fremont's desire to talk to him. They turned off into the woods, and coming to a little open glade sodded over with grass, Fremont threw himself down on the sward.

"Now we can talk," he said.

"Air you shore," said Bent, standing stiffly erect, "that you want to talk ter me?"

"Yes," replied Fremont, wondering again at this off-

ishness on Bent's part. "I didn't come here to-day to fish. I had something I wanted to talk with you about; but I told the folks I was going fishing. Sit down!"

"Shore," said Bent, as if relieved by the statement that Fremont's conversational purposes related back to the beginning of his journey, and had not arisen within the past two hours. "Crack ahead, Freem. I'll talk all night. I don't git a chance to talk to you of'en, y' know."

Bent radiated assent when Fremont opened up the case of Captain Ashe and his claim on the office of clerk of the courts. First, he was an old soldier. He was wounded at the battle of Gettysburg. And what was the sense of letting Raws Upright run things without let or hindrance? Fremont grew eloquent, but Bent stopped him in the midst of his loftiest flight.

"Wal," said he, "we don't mix in elections an' caucuses much, an' when we does, we ord'narily line up with Raws Upright, 'cause he's the strongest. But the question ain't what this here Captain Ashe wants. Seems like you've got somethin' comin' to you if he's elected, ain't you?"

Had he anything coming to him? He had never thought of such a thing! But, yes, there was his sharing of the great victory with Winifred. There was Winifred's—Winifred's approval, the accolade of Winifred's approval—and did not the bestower of knighthood formerly do so with an embrace, instead of by the blow on the shoulder? He would demand the ancient form!

"Yes," said he, "it means a lot to me!"

"Then," said Bently, "the Bushyagers'll be with Freem McConkey! What d'ye want us to do?"

"Do you think you can handle all your crowd?" asked Fremont.

"No," admitted Bent, "you'll haf to help. But I c'n do what I kin an' that's something. We can most of us git together at Uncle Forrest's to-night. You an' I can gether

up what ain't goin' an' hev 'em all thar. Le's go an' hitch to the double buggy, an' be on our way!"

Why, this seemed to be surprisingly easy! What had he done, to be able to command the support of these people? He could scarcely believe in his prospective success, but when they were all gathered together at Forrest Bushyager's spacious farm-house, he found himself selected for the place of honor. Uncle Forrest, white haired and jovial, the eldest of the Bushyagers, went so far as to talk educational matters with him, for he was the member of the family who was most nearly accepted as a normal member of society, and rather prided himself on that fact. Bowie, Bent's father, was a formidable figure; six feet tall, with curling beard once black but now grizzled, high cheek-bones, a form erect as an Indian's, and dead black, opaque eyes, accounting for the same features in Fremont's boyhood friend, Bently, his son. Bowie's face was horribly pock-pitted. He moved his hands, his head and his body with a deliberation which gave one a feeling that there was back of every motion an irresistible power. Pitt, younger than Bowie, was even taller, but his eyes were not so deadly opaque nor so black; they were larger and brown. His hair was curly, and he wore a black mustache and goatee slightly streaked with gray—a handsome man, with a free and easy manner which made him popular in certain circles. Asher Bushyager, between Pitt and Bowie in age, was heavier than either of them in frame, but shorter. He was the one who seldom spoke, but whose utterances were well weighed by the family when delivered. He had the reputation of being the planner of the family. There was something about him that would have given the unobservant the feeling that he was bashful, had it not been for the steady regard which he gave to whomever he might be looking at or talking with; and then he looked formidable. Claiborne, the youngest of the Bushyager brothers, was a

modernized edition of his eldest brother Forrest, save that he was addicted to drink and wild amusements. He, it will be remembered, had been wedded to Minnie Owsley, the daughter of Deek Owsley, just before Fremont had paid his first visit to the neighborhood.

And here they were, with their women and children about them, that dubious, questionable and equivocal family eating melons and drinking the tangy, mahogany-colored wine made from the wild grapes—hilarious, jocular, and extending to Fremont a hearty hospitality which made him apologize to himself for the reluctance with which he had undertaken his mission to them. Perhaps it is proof of his vocation as a writer which he had ever secretly claimed, that he understood these people in a way, and, after a fashion, sympathized with them. Yet, he felt in them certain limitations not only in morals but in intellect. In spite of their impenetrability, their formidable character, their power of impressing every one, he felt toward them as one does toward one of those strange boys who commit crimes from early childhood up, and do not seem to know that they are crimes. Yet, he laughed and joked with them as if one of the family, and really enjoyed himself, until he found himself under the scrutiny of a very old woman, dressed as if for labor in the cabbage patch, who seemed to view him with some disapproval. It was "Ol' Mis' Bushyager," the mother of all these stalwart mature men.

"When I was a gal," said she, "we had fiddlers that fiddled tunes! Now they jist begin in the middle of a tune an' fiddle both ways. Huh!"

Her granddaughter Sally explained to her by shouting in her ear, that this was not Owen Gowdy the fiddler, who had come with him that first time, but Freem McConkey that was so good to her and Bent when they went to the McConkey School, and the one that Bent herded cattle with so long, and that helped git the wild-goose eggs. Mrs.

Bushyager turned away, as if to consider this matter before altering her treatment of the guest. The encounter caused a short embarrassed silence. Bent brought one of the young children to Fremont's chair, carrying a *McGuffey's First Reader* in his little hand. Just as the book was being presented to Fremont, Mrs. Bushyager was heard speaking in that loud voice which some deaf people adopt to make sure of being heard, rather than the inaudible tone which others use because they can not hear it themselves, no matter how loud they speak.

"Has he come to spark, Sal?" she asked.

Fremont blushed scarlet; Sally, through her sallowness, colored to a salmon pink, and there was a general guffaw of laughter. Here was richness!

The old woman bridled in a little embarrassment, and favored the company with no more of her remarks until Bent's efforts had brought the little boy to Fremont's knee again; and then, putting her lips to the ear of a daughter-in-law, she shouted:

"My maw told me that when she was a gal, 'twas fash'nable to bundle!"

From his reading of Knickerbocker, Fremont understood. How Sally knew I have no idea; but she threw her apron over her head and burst from the room. Forrest Bushyager passed around sliced muskmelons and doughnuts, and his wife poured more of the wild-grape wine. There were no guffaws this time, but plenty of giggles and snickers, and when Claib asked Forrest whose patch he got the melons from, the obvious joke was greeted with uproarious laughter far beyond its deserts. And then Bent succeeded in putting the little Bushyager through his paces. He opened the book at the word "Preface," and when Bent told him to tell it the reg'lar way, he said, pointing to the letters in their turn:

"*P* for Peter, *R* for Rat, *E* for Emory, *F* for Fat,
A for Andrew, *C* for Cat, *E* for Emory ketched a rat!"

"That's good!" praised Fremont.

"Now tell it the Freem McConkey way," said Bent; and the little fellow went over the rigmarole which Fremont had used to astonish Bent that first day of school, pointing to each letter in turn to the end of the word, and back to the beginning again:

"*P*eter *R*ice *E*ats *F*ish, *A*lligators *C*atches *E*els,
*E*els *C*atches *A*lligators, *F*ish *E*ats *R*aw *P*otaters!"

"Don't you remember, Freem!" shouted Bent, a little elevated by the wine perhaps, and stirred out of his usual saturninity, slapping Fremont on the back: "I was scared to death, an' you took holt and learnt me to read. The best friend in school, herdin' or fishin' I ever had—an' whatever you want in this campaign that the Bushyagers kin help yeh to, all you've to do is to tell us, an' you'll git it. Anybody got anything to say ag'in' that?"

Everybody looked at the quiet gentle-mannered Asher.

"Shore," said he. "We're friends to our friends. Bent's be'n tellin' me about this. Captain Ashe is a fine man, but yo're the one we'll go out fer, Freem. Tell us what you want us to do."

Fremont explained that he had a plan for controlling the Crescent Township caucus, and taking it away from the Upright ring.

"It'll surprise old Raws if you do," said Asher. "It's something that's never be'n done yit. But we kin muster up quite a bunch o' votes fer yeh, Freem. Still, I reckon it'll be better to make a still hunt of it."

"That's what I want," said Fremont. "I guess we'd better not let anybody know."

"I reckon we kin keep it quiet," said Forrest. "An' I jest thought, I've got to hev a couple more hands. I might hire them two men you saw this afternoon, Bent."

"If they don't go on west," said Bent hastily.

"They'd be in the township ten days before the caucus," said Claib, "so they could vote all right."

"And now," went on Fremont, "now that we agree on keeping our work quiet, I want to tell you that I've a plan for running the caucuses that I haven't got worked out exactly yet, and you won't mind if I just tell it to one of you along toward the last, will you, and you all agree to act as he says?"

"That's right," said Asher. "Some one ought to be boss. Who do you want?"

"I think I'll leave that to you," said Fremont. "Any one you say."

"That's fair," said Asher. "Wal, boys, what do you say to lettin' Bent hyar be Freem's foreman in this?"

So *that* was agreed to. Fremont went home through the night in a state of great exaltation. He had fixed Crescent Township, he felt certain. For he had a wonderful system of tactics worked out for the caucuses. It would surprise people, if he could win by it. It was dramatic, too; and that, perhaps, was the reason why it appealed to him. It would almost do in a novel—if caucuses were not so prosaic, and so outside of what other novelists were writing about. And what a wonderful thing it was to share with Winifred Ashe! To be sure, the Bushyagers weren't exactly the most ideal voters with whom to make Winifred the daughter of the clerk of the courts—but he had to use such instruments as he could find. Wouldn't any one have used Carlos the Terrible, or Robin Hood to save his country withal? It might not be really necessary for the country's salvation for the captain to be the clerk of the courts, but the principle was the same. And maybe

those were not stolen horses heard whinnying in the woods after all. Every one was supposed to be innocent until proved guilty. The thing now was to prove himself a practical man instead of a dreamer, by carrying these caucuses for Captain Ashe—and Winifred!

CHAPTER IV

A REAL HERO FOR ONE CHAPTER

THE change of the name of a lady or a town works no change in the nature of either, as husbands and municipalities have often found to their cost. It is Monterey, and not Monterey Centre, to which we are now about to pay a visit; but it is very much the same hamlet we have seen before. Its new name, more fitting for a metropolis, fits its ambitions rather than its conditions. And yet, just on the western edge of the town are tents and shacks and rows of wheel-scrapers, and off across the prairie is a long scar in the earth, which digs into the hills and fills the swales, and is marked at every little rise of ground by another of those villages of tents and shacks and stables, where the song of the meadow-lark is drowned by the raucous braying of the graders' mules. This is the new railroad, building in. And it is the wedding of this little village, with its new "additions" already laid out which bestows on the hamlet the city's name.

The graders saw that there was excitement in town and wondered what these grangers found to get "het" up about —and went on gashing the prairie and building a city. Fremont McConkey, who got into town at nine o'clock with his Willow Township delegation, looked at the graders and wondered how they could be so unconcerned on the day that was to decide whether or not Winifred Ashe's father was to win or lose. The caucuses in Crescent Township,

Vandemark Township and Willow Township were held the evening before. Fremont knew the results in all of them. He was bringing the news to town with his votes. He wanted to go right to the captain's house and tell Winifred, but he resisted the temptation. It would be with his shield, or on it, when he went to *her!*

There were two rooms in the little building which Captain Ashe occupied as a real-estate and insurance office, the one back of the other. Fremont with his Willow Township delegation entered the first, and found it filled with men. A farmer was sitting in the captain's chair so surrounded by men standing that he was lost in a well of which he was the bottom, the sides Sunday suits, the mossy margin sweaty hair, and the water blue tobacco smoke. The captain was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's Captain Ashe?" asked Fremont.

"Back there!" some one answered, indicating the back room, the door of which Fremont could see over the heads.

"Can you let me through?" asked Fremont.

"Help yourself," said the man in front of him, swaying aside, "but he don't let any one in."

Well, then, thought Fremont, I'll wait out here. He saw people looking at his ruddy blond face, smoothly shaven, and with a beard which matched the skin in color so nearly that it looked girlish, and felt rather out of place in this sweating, crowding, jabbering, smoking sardine-box of men, who seemed to have nothing to do, and appeared to be doing it efficiently. Nobody knew him, and they looked at him because to them, too, he seemed out of place, as his blond head towered above all others in the office. He had made his way over nearly to the door, or at least near enough so that he could look in when it was opened. His old school director, whom I have called Uncle Jake Vandemark, because that is what everybody calls him now, pushed his way in, nodded to Fremont, and

stood with him before the door. They waited there a long time, it seemed to Fremont, but at last the door opened to let a man out. Captain Ashe, looking out as he sat at his desk, saw Mr. Vandemark in the outer room.

"Come in, Jake!" he cried out. "Let Vandemark in, boys!"

Fremont stepped aside to allow Vandemark to pass.

"You go ahead, Fremont," said Vandemark. "You're the man with the figures."

"Why, hello, Freem," said the captain, with no great show of joy. "How's the result in Willow Township?"

"All right," said Fremont. "How does the general result look?"

"Well," replied the captain, "the returns ain't all in yet; but I tell the boys not to give up. We'll show 'em a fight before we're through this convention! Who's on your delegation?"

"Here are the names of the delegates from Willow, Vandemark and Crescent," said Fremont, handing the captain a slip of paper. The captain reached for them eagerly, and he and Henderson L. Burns and Doctor Bliven scanned them for hope. Any one only a little more experienced than Fremont could have told from the captain's remarks in response to Fremont's question, that he felt defeated when they came in, notwithstanding his forced hopefulness. Now the three read the names, and looked at one another like doomed men who read a pardon.

"Well, dog my cats," exclaimed Henderson L., "these are our men, ain't they, Cap?"

"I'll say there are!" shouted the captain, leaping to his feet, and slapping Fremont on the back with one hand and Vandemark with the other. "I'll say they're our men! Why, this settles it! This settles it! This settles it! I'll say they're our men! We've won, by gad! We've won! Tom, bu'st out there an' tell Bill to pass out the word to

the fellers in the front room that we've got a clear majority in the convention. Tell them we've got the Upright gang skinned to a fare-you-well—full delegations from Crescent, Willow an' Vandemark! How did you do it, Jake? How did you do it?"

"Don't ask me," replied Vandemark. "Ask Freem here. He did it in all three townships!"

"He *did!*" The captain sank back in his chair astonished. He looked at Fremont's embarrassed, blushing face in wonder. "Well, you can't tell by the looks of a frog—say, Freem, how did you do it?"

"Why," replied Fremont, "I calculated that when the ring chairman of the precinct found he had a majority in the caucus, he'd call it to order; and so we waited outside, and when the caucus was called to order, we went in and ran it, in all three townships."

"The hell you say!" said the captain, clearly unenlightened. Fremont's dramatic stroke had not penetrated the captain's mind.

"How was it done, Squire?"

It was Doctor Bliven, now, appealing to Squire Vandemark for light on Fremont's Napoleonic tactics.

"Well," said Vandemark, "it was this way in Vandemark Township. Freem fixed it up for the Blake crowd to come over to his place for supper, so's to be on our side of Hell Slew. They brought along the hull neighborhood—always glad to take a whack at us, an' for the first time sence 1860, I was with 'em."

A great burst of applause in the front office drowned the squire's remarks.

"Tom's told 'em!" said H. L. "Well, go on, you was tellin' of how you lined up with Foster Blake after the long irrepressible conflict."

"Well," said Vandemark, "that good-for-nothing Bill Blake that Freem's hunted ducks with so much, wandered

into the caucus jest as George Story, Raws Upright's right-hand man in our township, looked around and saw he had a majority. George kind o' laughed in my face, an' said it was past time, an' called her to order. Bill Blake stepped to the door an' stood on the steps and lit a match for a Raws Upright campaign cigar that had been passed to him. He had follered the instructions of Freem, here, an' had all the north side crowd hid in a settin' of wheat across the road from the schoolhouse, where they went after they drove from Freem's father's after supper. The flare of the match was the signal for 'em to come into the caucus, an' in they come. George nearly dropped in his tracks, for he seen they could outvote him if they wanted to, an' why had they held back till the thing was called to order, if they didn't mean to? He hummed an' hawed some, an' said maybe they'd better wait till more come, but we took charge, an' elected our delegation. They made me precinct chairman for next year. That's the way it was worked in our township, boys."

"Slicker'n grease!" remarked Doctor Blivin. "Same prescription in the other places, Freem?"

"About the same," said Fremont. "It was easy. I'm on the delegation from our township, and I'd like to have you tell me what my duties are."

"You would!" said H. L. with a snort. "Your duties! My lord, we'll be lucky if you don't run the convention! Who was your lieutenant-general in Crescent? I see Forrest Bushyager on that delegation. First time any of them was ever on. How'd that happen, Freem?"

"Well," replied Fremont, wriggling uncomfortably under H. L.'s flattery, "Bent Bushyager helped me out there. He gave the signal after the caucus was called to order, and all the Bushyagers and their friends helped."

"They *did!*" Captain Ashe leaned back in astonishment. "Why, they always lined up with Raws, when they

took any interest. Will they stay put—but there's only one of 'em on the delegation."

"He'll stay put," said Fremont.

"I don't just place that feller, Bent," said Doctor Bliven.

"Bowie's boy," said Vandemark. "Young feller. Old friend of Freem's. Herded with him over by the Finster place when they was boys."

"Say, Freem," said the captain, grasping Fremont's hand and shaking it violently, "if you'd hunted ducks an' herded cattle with boys in every township, we could git away with murder in this county with your help. Why, boy, this is the greatest coup ever pulled off in this county, or in any other I ever saw! You're the hero of the day! You sent me word you had a scheme, but I expected of course I'd lose them three townships. Boy, I owe you a debt of gratitude that I never can pay in the wide world! And now le's get up to the court-house. It's nearly time for the convention to meet. You come along with me, Freem! You come along with me!"

Fremont, quite dazed, went along with the captain. It seemed odd that he should have so suddenly become the man nearest to the captain's heart, when he remembered the indifference with which he had been greeted. And Mr. Vandemark was now really almost neglected. There had been no protest against his winning those votes in Crescent Township with the aid of the Bushyagers, either. He was a little surprised at this, for he knew that there was widespread suspicion that the various thefts of horses and other live stock, and the two or three robberies that had been committed in the county and neighboring ones in recent years, and which had caused the reorganization of the Monterey County Anti-Horse-Thief Association, were remotely or directly related to the Bushyagers, or the mysterious strangers who had seemed to be connected with them. But H. L. and the captain seemed as glad to have

their votes as if they had been honest farmers. Maybe they were, after all.

Fremont had yet to learn that the offense of larceny has three degrees, instead of the two usually mentioned—petit, grand and that which goes on in caucuses! The Bushyager enlistment was to the minds of his political friends a joyful surprise, but quite regular and a matter for sincere rejoicing.

In the convention itself, which met at eleven o'clock at the court-house, Fremont found a new world swimming into his ken. In his mind he had lived in various climes, had roamed the world over, and breathed the air of romance—mostly very feverish—of the wilderness, and of far-off seas. He had warred in the Crusades, in old Peru and Mexico, had floated down the Amazon and watered his camels at many a palm-shadowed oasis, but in real life he had never seen a boat nor ridden on a railway train, while this little straggling village of Monterey Centre was the largest of the cities of men that he had ever visited. He had read of political conventions, as of things quite as remote from his personal affairs; and now he was not only present at one, but he was a member of it. He had looked forward to its convening as to the gathering of men in some manner superior to him, entrusted with great functions, related to the public weal. He found the same sort of people he had worked with on the road, and seen in school meetings in the country townships. And gradually he began feeling toward them a little as he had felt toward the Bushyagers that Sunday night. That they were, after all, rather common, and tainted with a certain sinister contamination. He was embarrassed because he did not know what to do, much as he might have been in a gambling den, where he was afraid of being ridiculous because of his greenness—but after all, let it be confessed, Fremont felt a sense of superiority, morally and intellectually, to

these men gathered in the County Convention of Monterey County. And then he became engrossed in learning the game, and in trying to play it.

There was a tenseness in the atmosphere. Roswell Upright had not made his appearance, but it was whispered about the court room that he had a fight on his hands, and was not sure of winning. This was astonishing. Men wondered how the fight would manifest itself. Without opposition, N. V. Creede, the great Monterey lawyer, was made temporary chairman, and talked wonderfully well on nothing at all until men who ate their dinners at noon, began asking each other what time it was. No contest was made over the position of temporary secretary, and on motion a Committee on Credentials was appointed consisting of one member from each precinct, chosen by the delegations themselves, and then the convention adjourned until two o'clock.

"Come up to my house to dinner, Freem," said the captain, but Fremont declined. He must see Winifred either bearing his shield or borne on it. "Well," said the captain, "I guess I won't go up, if you can't go. Lots to do in mixin' around. See you later. See anything wrong with that temporary organization?"

"No," said Fremont, who would not have seen it if it had been framed to unseat himself and all his friends, "it looked all right to me."

"Raws wouldn't have let the delegations appoint their own members of the Credentials Committee," ventured the captain, "if he'd be'n sure he had control. I tell yeh, he sees he's licked."

It was Fremont's first meal at a hotel. It was not the new Monterey House erected the next year, when the second railway built in, but the old St. Troplas Hotel, and the man who seized upon him as he entered and took him to a small table in a corner, was Paul Holbrook—who

seated Fremont with his back to the crowd, which he himself faced.

"I want to talk with you, Fremont," said he. "I understand that you out-generaled the Upright gang in three townships in the caucuses."

"Oh, it was nothing," said Fremont. "Any one could have done it."

"I don't know about that," replied Paul, gazing in something like wonder at Fremont, through his pinch-nose glasses. "Upright is said to have raved like a crazy man when he heard of it. And now what are you going to do with the votes you have here?"

"I'm going to vote for Captain Ashe," said Fremont. "I suppose the rest will vote as they feel they ought to."

Young Holbrook noticed that Fremont made no attack on his food until the way had been indicated by his fellow diner, and rather pitied him for his verdancy; so he was surprised, and he looked at Fremont in wonder—wonder at this non-committal speech. He had no idea that Fremont could be serious. He took the answer which this political neophyte made to him to mean that Paul Holbrook was not to be given any information as to the deal which had been made with Captain Ashe's block of votes. Or, perhaps the captain had not confided his plans to the country boy. So in any case there was no use in pushing the conversation further.

"I'd like to ask you," said Fremont, "about going to college."

After all, this was a topic on which Paul was better informed than he feared he ever would be on politics. People who saw the two hobnobbing over their meal thought that this Willow Township sky-rocket and young Holbrook were preparing to pull off some coup in the convention, no doubt; but Paul was explaining that Fremont could go to the State University with a small amount of

money, and if he was willing to work his way through, he probably could make a go of it. He might be obliged to take a little longer, but he could do it. Was he ready to enter? Fremont did not know. What did he have to do in order to enter? Didn't they take any one who wanted to study? No, Paul told him, and as Fremont confided in him his lack of Latin, algebra and geometry, Holbrook informed him that he would have to do some preparatory work first, but that with his other preparation, this would not take long. He would suggest that he go to Mount Vernon, where there was a good preparatory school, and after he got there, he might feel like taking the full course at Cornell College. Fremont was lost to politics when Captain Ashe came over and seized upon him bodily to take him to the convention.

"No use bothering with Paul," said he, "he failed to git on the Monterey delegation."

But Paul sought another word with him in the court-house yard, under a little hard maple tree—that afterward became that huge globe of verdure which was removed when they built the new court-house in 1892, just before the second Monterey boom collapsed. It was just high enough then so that the two young fellows could stand under its branches.

"I think," said Paul, "and father thinks, that the real object Upright has in this convention is to control the nomination for county auditor, and especially members of the board of supervisors. The supervisors make appropriations and let contracts, and the auditor keeps the books and attends their meetings—he's on the inside of the finances. Are you pledged on supervisors and auditor? If Upright controls them he can afford to let us have the clerk and superintendent, and still run the county."

"No," answered Fremont. "Who do you think would be the best man?"

Paul handed Fremont a slip of paper. Fremont opened it, glanced at the names, and went into the convention with the folded paper in his pocket. He was beginning to see dimly the factors in this new game. Apparently, however, though he saw that Roswell Upright had made his appearance on the floor of the convention, and was passing from man to man, smiling and joking, and here and there whispering to delegates, and finally sitting down for a few moments beside Forrest Bushyager of the Crescent Township delegation, he was making no effort to balk what Fremont liked to call the "will of the people." When it came to the nomination of clerk of the courts, though Fremont trembled with anxiety, Captain Ashe carried off the prize rather easily. When Crescent Township announced its solid vote for the captain, some one back of Fremont said in a low tone, "That settles it." Even the Monterey delegation divided its vote.

"Old Raws is slidin' down the pole," said this low voice from the rear. "He's joining the majority. He owns that delegation, body, soul and britches."

There was a burst of applause when the nomination was announced. Delegates crowded around the captain and slapped him on the back. Clearly the country was saved again. And then a group formed about the Willow Township delegation. Fremont was astonished that they were congratulating *him!* They slapped *him* on the back! Some one proposed a cheer for him, which was given with good will. He cowered down in his seat in an agony of embarrassment, and just as some one called for a speech from McConkey, the chairman rapped loudly for order, and said that the next thing was the nomination of a candidate for county superintendent. Henderson L. Burns was passing from delegation to delegation urging his supporters to stick—plainly not without anxiety. The principal of the Lithopolis schools was put in nomination. Walter Byington

rose in his place and in a rather stumbling speech nominated Henderson L. Burns, a man whom we all know, a wheel-horse of the party since it was organized, a man who helped found the county of Monterey, and one whom every old settler had known and liked for years. And then Fremont saw Uncle Jake Vandemark rise and say, "Mr. Chairman!"

"The gentleman from Vandemark Township!"

"I want to put in nomination," said he, "a man that, while he hain't lived in the county as long as some, has be'n here all his life. He was born here. We in our part of the county know him. He's the best teacher we've ever had. He's a member of this convention, an' his doin's lately shows he's to be a man of some influence among us. He'll make a good county superintendent. I nominate Fremont McConkey of Willow Township!"

The chairman of the Lithopolis delegation rose in his place, and addressed the chair. "The Lithopolis delegation," said he, "knows and admires the rising young educator of Willow Township." Fremont looked at him in astonishment. There was no member of the Lithopolis delegation with whom he had ever had ten minutes' conversation, and most of them he did not even know by sight. This stranger went on: "Lithopolis, therefore, animated by affection, esteem and respect, seconds the nomination of Fremont McConkey!"

The rising young educator of Willow Township was shamefacedly indignant. They were making game of him! He attempted to rise so as to leave the hall, when some one pushed him back into his seat. The roll-call proceeded. It filled Fremont with astonishment. People were actually voting for him! In fact, when the roll had been called, some one showed him a tabulation disclosing the fact that Henderson L. Burns led the poll with about forty per cent. of the votes; Fremont stood second, and the Oak Grove

candidate third. Uncle Jake leaned over and whispered to Fremont.

"The next ballot will nominate you," said he. "That Oak Grove feller ain't be'n in the county only six months. You got it won!"

"Freem, Freem!" It was Henderson L. now who was bursting through the crowd to appeal to him. "Are you goin' back on me like this? W'y, all through this campaign, I've be'n lotting your support. You said you were for me. Are you goin' to be a traitor to me now you've got a chance?"

The second roll-call was already under way. Arlington Township headed the list. It had voted for Burns, but it announced its entire vote for Fremont. One of Upright's lieutenants in the next delegation called, and made a neat little speech. His delegation, he said, had cast its vote for the learned gentleman from Oak Grove, but it was clear that the choice of the convention for this important office was that splendid young representative of the rural schools, Mr. McConkey. He, therefore, was authorized to withdraw the name of their candidate and they were free to support their real choice, and he, therefore, further moved that Mr. Fremont McConkey be declared the unanimous nominee of the convention by acclamation. Henderson L. threw up his hands in despair. Fremont rose slowly to his feet.

"Wait till you're nominated," said a voice behind him. "Don't make your acceptance speech yet—you fool!"

But Fremont stood firm. He choked as he tried to address the chair. The chairman saw him, and recognized him.

"The gentleman from Willow Township, Mr. Fremont McConkey!" said he.

"Mr. Chairman," said Fremont, "I thought at first that this was a joke,—it looks like one to me yet. If I'm a

fool for taking it seriously, why, I hope the convention will excuse me. I never was in a convention before. I am only just of age this summer. And that's why I think you must be joking about nominating me for this office; for I am too young for it. I must decline to leave my name before it any longer. I came here to vote for Mr. Burns for county superintendent, and I shall vote for him. I ask all my friends to vote for Mr. Burns. I should be a traitor to him and to myself if I took the nomination under the circumstances. That's all, Mr. Chairman!"

"Damned young fool!" said the voice behind.

Some one moved that as Mr. Burns was the only candidate before the convention, he be nominated by acclamation, and before the Oak Grove man's friends could object, H. L. was nominated.

Fremont received the thanks of the victor, sat through the remainder of the proceedings, voted for the Upright candidates for supervisor and auditor without looking at Paul Holbrook's paper in a sort of hypnotic automatism of condition. The convention adjourned. He was told that his speech was the best ever made in a Monterey convention, and was surprised to realize at last that it was Uncle Jake Vandemark who told him this. The voice behind came around in front of him.

"Remember when I picked you out of the grass in front of the team out by the McConkey place? Well, I never thought you'd lay in the grass an' bite the foot that fed you like this!" It was Roswell Upright who was speaking. He was the voice behind, which had whispered the nomination of Fremont about the convention. "You lick me in the caucuses, an' now you won't let me jine what's too strong for me to beat. But you had that nomination for county superintendent all sewed up, my boy!"

"I have other plans," said Fremont, "I am going to the State University."

"I'm for anything that'll git you out of the Monterey caucuses," said Upright. "I know when I'm licked."

"Licked, hell!" said N. V. Creede, who had come up to look over the hero of the convention, the country boy from Willow Township. "As usual Old Raws goes off with just what he wants. My boy, you did a creditable thing here to-day. If I can ever do you a favor, come and see me."

"Say, Freem," whispered Captain Ashe, "that was heroic, but it wasn't politics. Git while the gittin's good! But it's all over now. An' I can't ever tell you how much I owe you for nominatin' me—for that's what you've done, for better or for worse. An' my girl, Winnie, says she knew all about it all the time, an' that you promised to come and do a little gloatin' with her if we won. I can't go up with you, but she's waitin' for you up at the house now."

"Well," said Paul Holbrook, "I see you used your strength to perpetuate the gang rule in the county, McConkey. Remember while you are a hero, that there's some of us that know that!"

His brain whirled. If you can imagine an ordinary country precinct leader with a few years of experience in county politics, suddenly become the central figure in a national convention, you will be able to imagine the way in which events had crowded upon this visionary boy who was still only a dreamy clodhopper in this little affair in Monterey. There was no clarity in his mind as to whether he had been the hero or the villain of the day. One thing only, was simple—Winifred Ashe, and with her, her father's nomination. From the Ashe point of view he was bearing his shield as he went up to the door, and when he lifted his hand to tap upon it, found it opening; and standing in the hall alone, Winifred, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining, and her arms open as if to embrace him.

CHAPTER V

TAPPING THE INTERNAL HEAT

I HAVE not told you all that happened when Winifred Ashe met Fremont at her father's door when he went to her, bearing his shield, from the stricken field of the county convention. I shall not tell you. Why, if Winifred had wanted it described, had she managed, as girls always can, to be alone in the house when he came to her? And I hope we shall always be able to keep inviolate a lady's secret. I hope so—but the promise extends to this episode only; and even as to this, I may go so far as to say that there were tears in her dear eyes as she remonstrated with him for having left her in suspense so long.

Perhaps you and Spig, my dear Dorothy, may judge as to what took place there on the sofa in the Ashe parlor —or what did not—by Fremont's state of mind afterward. You will remember that the Teachers' Institute, the first ever held in that county, was to open the next Monday morning, and that Fremont was to be the guest of the Ashe family during his attendance upon its classes. He was to be for three or four weeks—I forget which—under the same roof with Winifred. Such bliss! Such a plexus of problems! Such embarrassment! Such anticipations! And after the convention, even while he was in the spotlight of such publicity as could be had in those days, he was agitated about, he suffered with reference to two things. That is, these two things were those which were acute. He had manifold chronic and latent troubles.

He had learned that Catherine Ashe was the real head of the household, and did the cooking and managing. May was useful to a degree, compatible with her various lessons and the parties she attended. Winifred was essential to everything, but specifically, she did the dusting and made up the beds. Therefore, the bed left by Fremont on rising would be a revelation of his nature to the most wonderful girl in the world, who had that day in the parlor—but I must leave that mystery unsolved.

Such being the posture of affairs, Fremont was suffering on the subject of—I must set it down—of nightshirts. He was a groveling being, but he desired to stand as high in her estimation as possible. He had never worn a nightshirt. He suspected that in the higher circles of Monterey society this garment was worn. In his family circle, it was at the opposite end of the classification table from the *toga virilis*. The McConkeys belonged to that class of Iowans who about at this period defeated a certain candidate for Congress, mainly because he was detected in the wearing of a nightshirt. It made him an old woman in the eyes of the voters. Men and boys retired in the shirt worn during the day, save when summer heat, sweat and soil made some clean worn-out shirt a necessary substitute—don't smile that superior smile, my dear! Your sweetheart's father probably omitted the change just mentioned. Fremont worried over it simply because he was exceptional. The average country boy would never have suspected that there could be such a dilemma. But, thought Fremont, suppose the miraculous happens, and Winifred stoops to make up my bed, and "red up" the room. She shall find no stain of the earth in which I have been working on pillow or sheet; but suppose in her circle, the male of the species on rising, takes off his night garment and hangs it up? She finds none. She wonders what has become of it. Her innocent soul is agitated at her guest's poverty, or shocked

at his barbarism. He takes his place in her mind with the savage, who may look civilized, but who after all, wears a dress shirt with his legs in the sleeves, and a tall hat under an umbrella which he closes when it rains. In other words, he is a savage. Rather drop to the nether hell of oblivion in Winifred's mind than to be rated as such a savage!

Then there was the matter of cuffs. Collars were no longer a difficulty. He had a whole box of paper collars and could get more at any store, and the necktie of black which he had just bought fastened by a loop of rubber cord to his collar button, and was held in place by a shield of cardboard which went under the flap of the collar. But he knew that Paul Holbrook had some other arrangement in the way of cuffs. The cuffs to Fremont's white shirts, of which he had the ample number of three, were mere wristbands (pronounced "rizbans") and did not show below his coat sleeves. He was sure that the town fellows had some other device. He planned to lay in wait in some barber shop to find out, but in the physiology class at the Institute one day, the problem was made plain. The instructor in making some demonstration, removed his coat, and then took off his cuffs! Within a day Fremont had bought a supply of cuffs at the general store. There was no general laundry in Monterey then, and Fremont's new requirements called for a higher gloss than the home treatment could give. He was now finding out how to learn things about "gent's furnishings," and one of the things was that all the cuffs soiled in Monterey went by mail to Rochester, New York, to be laundered. Yes, the custom called for paper collars and laundry work done along the Erie Canal—hence the name "Troy Laundry"—even later than 1878. Such are the important things we learn as Fremont did in the higher institutions of learning—including Teachers' Institutes! But that nightshirt question re-

quired settlement before he went to be the guest of the Ashe family.

"Got your satchel packed, Fremont?" asked his mother the day before he was to go to Monterey.

"Yes," said Fremont.

"What's that heavy package?" she asked.

"Books," said Fremont. "The Institute conductor wants us to bring text-books in all the branches."

"I've got something for you to take with you," said she, displaying a package. "Some nightshirts for a man. Your Aunt Zuby saw the ones the new cashier of the bank at Lithopolis wears—you know what a neat dresser he is—has everything in the latest style—and young, too. Zuby got the chance to cut out yourn from the way his is made when they was at the washerwoman's. I thought maybe now your name's in the papers, an' you're goin' out where folks know what's what, you'd feel a little better if you had 'em. An' the Lord knows anything I can do to make up for the way you've be'n made a hermit all of these years, I feel I ought to do!"

Fremont took his mother's hand and pressed it. As I have stated elsewhere, in a McConkey this was equivalent in a less impressive family to a flight of eloquent emotion, and a flood of tears ending in a convulsive embrace. Tears filled her eyes, as she accepted this tribute of affection. Fremont looked the garments over with gratitude.

"Are you sure the young men wear 'em?" he asked. "Of course they do, or Mr. Walters wouldn't. I'm awful glad to have 'em, ma!"

I wonder how much of our shades of culture as popularly understood are made up of common practises and differences on such fundamental matters as nightshirts, paper collars, and detachable cuffs. I'm intending to treat this subject sometime.

How had his mother known? That she had under-

stood his perplexity, and of the impossibility of his discussing it with any one, was perfectly clear to him. He did not understand, until after years of pondering on it, that there was no time in his life when she did not spend a part of every day putting herself in his place; and he never quite understood how exactly she was usually able to do this. That is why she always found the stray verses which Fremont would like in papers and magazines; knew the songs he would love, appreciated the nonsense which would make him laugh. That is why she had every year made a mental march which kept her, as she hoped, within sight of her son, and he afterward sometimes realized, somewhat in advance of him. The heart that penetrated the complexity of the social problem of Fremont's nightshirts did so because it was Fremont's own heart beating in a mother's bosom. And it was his mother's brain in his cranium—the brain of the woman of the frontier, who, as she said, had not been born in the woods to be scared by owls; the brain of the woman who had never been to school, but who for all that was the oracle of her family on things learned from the printed page; the woman who was always ashamed of her lack of culture, but who in her old age found herself sought by men and women of intellect because what she thought was so interesting, and they sometimes thought, so profound; this woman who represents the greatest of all sociological facts, the capacity of the neglected and submerged for development—it was this brain which heredity had placed in Fremont McConkey's skull, which caused him to be so avid for ideas, so hungry for expression, so sensitive as to his ignorance (of which he was painfully conscious), so proud of his knowledge as a sort of secret, so effective when he did the thing that amounted to rowing with the stream, so prone to mistake the direction in which the stream flowed, or to choose deliberately the struggle with the torrent; in short

to be that tall, intellectual-looking, very countryfied, awkward boy who walked to the first session of the Teachers' Institute with Winifred Ashe, so proud and embarrassed, and whose name was whispered about the lobbies among the young people, most of them more or less like him, as the young fellow from Willow Township who had nominated their next county superintendent, Henderson L. Burns, by being able to control the votes of the Bushyager gang in Crescent Township. And sometimes adding, what Captain Ashe had almost said when he found out what Fremont had done, "You can never tell from the looks of a frog how far he can jump."

The mothers of the frontiers! They felt the oncoming of another day for their children. No life was so laborious, no situation so unpropitious, no poverty so deep that they did not through a divine gift of prophecy see beyond the gloom a better day for their children. In the smoky overheated kitchens, struggling to feed the "gangs" of harvesters and thrashers, as they washed and mopped and baked and brewed and spun and wove and knit and boiled soap and mended and cut and basted and sewed and strained milk and skimmed cream and churned and worked over butter, catching now and then an opportunity to read while rocking a child to sleep, drinking in once in a while a bit of poetry from the sky or the cloud or the flower; they were haloed like suns of progress for their families and for their nation, as they worked and planned and assumed for themselves a higher and higher culture of its sort—all for their children. We build monuments in the public square for the soldiers of our wars; but where is the monument for the Kate McConkeys who made possible so much of the good which is represented by the public square itself? Unless it is a monument not made with hands, in our hearts and souls, none can ever exist which can be in any way adequate.

Fremont went with Winifred to the conductor's desk so that they might register as members of the Institute. Winifred led the way. She was younger than Fremont, but she took the lead as a "city broke" horse might do with a colt from the pastures. They had agreed that they would sit together, "so you can help me in my studies," as Winifred had said—and then the conductor, who was talking with the teachers and getting a little acquainted with them, wreaked a dreadful wrong upon them. He told Fremont that, as he was in possession of a first-grade certificate, he must go in the "A" class, while poor Winifred, having no experience as a teacher, and really not knowing whether she expected to be a teacher or not, would enter the "D" class, while the holders of second-grade and third-grade certificates would go in the "B" and "C" class, respectively.

Winifred made a mouth at the conductor, Professor Gardiner, behind his back—the most marvelous, expressive, enthralling grimace in the world, which set Fremont's heart beating—and she went away to her own place. Fremont wanted to ask whether he might not go into the "D" class, too; but he saw how absurd this would be. That moment tells the story of the whole experience—his first among people of any sort of education, and what is called culture—at this Teachers' Institute; the struggle between the attractions of the new little world in which he found himself, and those of Winifred Ashe.

You must put yourself in his place or you will not be able to feel or to understand what this Institute meant to Fremont the Neatherd. It was his first experience with people gathered together to study—with the atmosphere of mind reacting on mind in the field of books and thought. To be sure, we dealt then and there with no such things as Latin, Greek or the higher mathematics. The government was seeking to develop teachers with some slight knowledge that such things as didactics and peda-

gogics existed, and who could pass very simple examinations in the common branches. But these gatherings brought to the villages which were county-seats a few men of culture and ability. Professor Gardiner, for instance, seemed to me then, and after all these years still seems, a man of great learning and fine attainments. He was a graduate from some eastern university. What current of fate could have stranded him as principal of the Monterey High School has always been a mystery to me. He came with his family, remained long enough to give to certain minds impulses which bear them along to-day, and went on, God knows where.

The language used by him, by Paul Holbrook, who had classes in "civil government," by the elocutionist who showed Fremont how to read, and who taught classes in physiology, and by the lecturers who entertained not only the teachers but the people of the village of evenings, was a thrilling thing. Fremont had read bales of such sentences, but he had never heard them spoken by those who used habitually such diction, and who pronounced correctly. He found his own manner of speaking changing day by day. He blushed when he remembered that only a few years ago he had spoken of an institution of technology as a "School of Teach-Knowledgy," thinking the word descriptive of what it did! He reveled in these sidelights on what he already knew. And his teachers saw in his rapt expression that this gawky boy was in a state of exaltation. They wondered what caused it. What was there in reading, arithmetic, geography, grammar, physiology and the like to fill any mind with such a rush of enthusiasm as came forth from him when they called upon him to recite? Why, he was almost eloquent!

There was nothing of course—and there was everything. When a little fissure opens up into the heart of Vesuvius, the heat and vapor and lava burst forth among

the vines and olive trees with perplexing power—to one who does not know that the outgushing comes from the molten heart of the earth itself. Fremont was in a state of flux and incandescence. He was dissolved by this little, pitiful contact with the world of thought; and he was melted by Winifred.

BOOK FOUR

CHAPTER I

THE SWAN'S NEST AMONG THE REEDS

GREAT events sometimes emerge from slight causes—or seem to do so. Perhaps this has been previously noted. The triviality I have in mind, however, which apparently led to things momentous in this history, is the fact that the Ashe residence had a parlor, in addition to its sitting-room. This shows that it was a house of the better class for an Iowa village of 1878. It had no such luxuries as running water, or stationary bathtubs and what goes with them; but it did have, instead of the usual rain-board and rain-barrel, a cistern from which Catherine pumped water right into her sink in the kitchen, a little front hall, a dining-room, a sitting-room and a parlor.

"You'll want a place to study, Fremont," said Catherine that very first Monday morning. "A place where this noisy little May won't drive you crazy with her racket, so we've fixed up the parlor for you."

"I'm afraid that's taking up too much of the house," said Fremont. "I can study all right in my bedroom."

"But we thought," continued Winifred, "that maybe

you'd help me a little with my work—if it won't bother you too much. Will it?"

"*We've* thought," repeated Catherine, "I'm sure I never thought anything of the kind. You'd be almost as bad as May—and you're getting too big to be whipped. I haven't punished you for three or four months."

"You punish me!" said Winifred, putting her arm about Catherine's waist. "Maybe May and I would be better girls if our big sister hadn't always been better to us than we deserved! Well, *I* thought of it. Will I bother you too much if I ask you to help me just a little bit in the hard places?"

Would she? Fremont avoided the impossible task of telling her how much she wouldn't, by saying that he would in all likelihood be the one to receive help from her, and it would be a fine thing to have her the joint-tenant of the parlor.

It seems like a trivial thing, doesn't it?

On the occasion of her first intrusion, as she called it, on the privacy of his studies, she came in holding in her hand a copy of the *Monterey Journal,* pointing to a long account of the County Convention and its proceedings.

"Have you seen this, Fremont?" she asked.

He had not believed his mother when she had said that his name would be in the paper, but here it was. It was in Dick McGill's happiest vein, full of allusion to matters related to the members of the great body, most of which Fremont did not understand because of his lack of familiarity with county gossip; but he gasped when he saw what related to himself.

"What the censorious call the 'County Ring,' meaning the group of patriots who have controlled our politics so 'Uprightly' in recent years, had our affable and gallant friend, Captain Fillmore Ashe, soundly skinned up to the

morning of the convention. The captain's cuticle was restored by one complete application of 'McConkey's Healing Balsam,' made from natural roots and yarbs grown in the timber of the dingly dells of Crescent Township. Doctor McConkey is familiar with the roots, yarbs, weeds and grasses, having been by his own admission, in former years, 'a neatherd.' "

"Papa must have told him that!" exclaimed Winifred. "The mean thing! But I don't care, do you, Fremont?"

"N—n—no," said Fremont hesitantly. "Not if you don't!"

Let us read on while Dorothy prepares to tell us what this "not if you don't" means.

"Those who had picked another patriot for County Clerk expected on form to have the delegations from Vandemark, Willow and Crescent. Why not? They always had. Sometimes there have been complaints from the unsuccessful that the caucuses have been packed, but who cares what the failures say? Nothing succeeds like success! In this case the successful say that the caucuses were packed, and that it was done by the anti-Ashe workers. Then why, say you, did not the votes come in for the packers? Well, because a rural genius in politics neatly unpacked them and packed them over again for the gallant captain. Young Fremont McConkey, son of that solid rural dweller, Alvin McConkey of Willow Township, held out enough votes in each of these precincts, caching them in stack yards, coal houses and groves, until the so-called 'Ring' had called the caucuses to order with the votes to win with in an 'Upright' way; and then some one lit a match in front of the door, and in came the cards from the cold deck, and outvoted the regulars, and Captain Ashe had just a few more than he needed to win with in the convention.

"Ladies and gentlemen, meet Mr. John Charles Fremont McConkey of Willow Township, 'Napoleon' of

county politics and 'neatherd!' All he lacks to be a great comer is to get rid of a few principles. He was pledged to H. L. Burns for county superintendent. But our friend 'Cow Vandemark of Vandemark' nominated him for county superintendent, and Raws Upright, by way of mounting the band wagon, began 'neatherding' the votes over the McConkey way. We'd have done the same thing in his place. McConkey was nominated, but before the vote could be declared, he rose in his place in the convention and made a speech in a language never before heard in Monterey County. He was hard for some of us old-timers to understand, but he finally made us understand that he wasn't old enough. Ye gods, Roswell, to be skinned by an infant like that! He said he was going to college. He insisted that he was pledged to H. L. and by gosh, he wanted all his friends to vote for Burns. So that's how Henderson L. was put on the ticket. Ye editor takes occasion to whisper a word in 'Little Freemie's,' ear: 'A Napoleon is a Napoleon, Fremont. Maybe when you're in college you'll study French history. If you do, you'll come across the favorite maxim of the greatest of all Frenchmen, the Napoleonic aphorism, which we translate from the original for the benefit of our few readers who don't know French. The maxim is, 'Git while the gittin's good. He that will not when he may, when he will, he may have nay!' "

"Aren't you proud?" asked Winifred.

"I don't know," replied Fremont. "It seems as if he was making light of me!"

"Well, if you're not proud," said she, her eyes shining, "I am! I'm prouder of you than I am of papa's getting the office, though you don't know how badly we need it. I'm glad of that, but I'm proud of you. I'm going to put this in a scrap-book, and I'm going to keep in that book all the fine things that are printed about you all your life, till it's full!"

He was proud of the fact that Winifred was determined

to keep this scrap-book; far more so than of the fame derived from his past deeds. But what did she mean by saying she was proud? There were two senses in which the word was used colloquially. To be proud of another in the correct sense of the word meant—why, it meant something of such immensity that he would not allow himself to believe it.

They did not quite fail to carry out that project of Winifred's for him to help her with her institute lessons. The way in which he explained by diagrams the extraction of the cube root of a number was wonderful. Catherine looked in just then, and told her father that she had never heard anything so clear. Winifred said she believed that she could use the same method and make it just as clear to a class of pupils—even if she wasn't quite sure about understanding it herself. And as for diagramming sentences in grammar, it would never hold any terrors for her, after Fremont had illustrated it with:

> "And when its yellow luster smiled
> O'er mountains yet untrod,
> Each mother held aloft her child,
> To bless the bow of God."

One night they went to a church where Professor Preston, he of the detachable cuffs, gave readings. Among them was a rendition of *King Robert of Sicily*. Never afterward was Fremont so thrilled by words falling from human lips—and he saw many great actors in mighty rôles. When the elocutionist—it seems to me still that he was a most excellent one—repeated the lines in which the haughty king, reduced to the rôle of a court fool, when asked by the angel who had assumed his throne: "Art thou the King?" and the passion of his woe,

"Burst from him in resistless overflow,
And lifting high his forehead, he would fling
The haughty answer back, 'I am, I am the King.'"

Fremont half rose from his seat with the lift of the tragic protest, the burst of this lava of indignation out of the crater of despair. And there was a lofty satisfaction in his breast when after the King's trial had gone to its climax, the angel said to King Robert again, "Art thou the King?" and

"King Robert crossed both hands upon his breast
And meekly answered him: 'Thou knowest best.'"

Perhaps it was not the most skilful hand which swept the cords, but what an instrument Fremont was! All those years of boyhood, solitary so far as concerned Art, with the soul eagerly sorting over chaff and orts for a few jewels—and here was another soul speaking to him in the language of genius! (We thought Longfellow a genius in those days, my dear.)

Fremont's hand found Winifred's. The two hands clasped. With his other hand the boy wiped the tears of divine agony from his eyes. Winifred's eyes were dimmed a little, but not at the conversion of King Robert. She was stirred by the effect upon Fremont of this mysterious passion of his for expression—stirred, though she was at the same time mystified. She wept frankly with Fremont, however, at the last piece, one in which Professor Preston wrung out the last tear from *The Death of Poor Little Jo,* that bit of Dickens at his teariest. They slipped out of the door before the rest and walked home arm in arm—which was in itself significant, at a time and place when to walk "locked arms" was supposed to mean something. But

Fremont was swept too far from the moorings of his Anglo-Saxon reticence to find anchorage at once. He would have taken her in his arms on the street with only a little more of this intoxication of the new wine to whose stimulus he was so extraordinarily susceptible. They went into the house without a word, and finding no one to greet their return, went into their own parlor, and sat side by side on the horsehair sofa. Fremont bowed his face in his hands. He was thinking of the joy of creating such things as he had heard read, all of which were new to him. Lines of verse, passages of impassioned prose echoed through his mind.

"I am that court jester!" he exclaimed. "And I feel as he did! 'I am, I AM the King.'"

Winifred drew a little away from him, but he did not observe it. He did not observe anything, except the figments of his imagination, and the sweet girl sitting by his side, the warmth of whose arm he could still feel in the hollow of his own.

"Sometime," he said, turning an impassioned face to her, "sometime people will be reading what I shall write as he read these lines to-night. Winifred, Winifred, I am a writer, too!"

His voice quivered, and he seemed bursting into sobs. He turned his face to the back of the sofa and hid it on his arm. If she had not done what she did, he would have left the house that night and never seen her again.

She put her arms about him, much as a mother might have done, kissed him lightly on the forehead, raised his head and looked into his eyes. Then for some minutes they sat, looking away from each other, hand in hand. Then she turned to him with such simple confidence in his truth that he was drawn to meet it with equal trust.

"Tell me about it, Fremont," she said. "I wish I could

read something you have written—as he read those things to-night."

That is why Fremont walked home on Friday evening. He was needed for the farm work, and his father felt a glow of approbation as the big boy walked in just as the family were preparing to retire.

"Wal, Freem," said he. "I see you thought of the farm work an' hurried home."

"Yes. I suppose you're as pushed as ever."

"Which would you ruther do," asked his father, "plow to-morrow, or go over to the Mason's thrashing?"

"I'll plow," said Fremont.

"You'd better," said his mother. "While you've got to study this way it ain't safe to take your eyes into the chaff an' dust of a thrashin' machine. How did you like the Institute?"

Fremont liked it. He sat up late telling his mother about the teachers and teachers-to-be in attendance, and the wonderful people who lectured and instructed these young folks. He had a list of the names of attendants and instructors as it appeared in the *Monterey Journal,* and on the same page was the account of the convention.

"I was a little ashamed when I saw that," he said.

"I don't think you need be,'" said his mother. "I feel proud of you." (The same words Winifred had used! If he could only tell his mother about Winifred—but no—he simply couldn't speak of it to any one!) "It wouldn't have been put in that way if Dick McGill hadn't thought you'd done something kind o' big. Of course, there's a lot of Dick McGill's balderdash in it; but it's nothing to be ashamed of, Fremont. I'm proud of it!"

This outburst of uncontrolled expression of affection called for a period of silence between two McConkeys.

"How do you like studyin' at Captain Ashe's?" she inquired at last.

He liked it very much he told her. The captain was always so jolly and friendly; though he didn't see him sometimes for a whole day except at breakfast. And May was an awfully nice little girl, if Catherine did say she was naughty. She had great brown eyes, almost a red-brown, and her hair was so long it touched the floor as she sat with it over her chairback. But she seemed stunted in her growth. But Catherine was a wonderul girl, Fremont asserted. She was just like a mother to the whole family, including her father. She made him put on his heavy clothing when it was cold, and made him mind just like a little boy, which he always did, laughing.

"Poor child!" said Mrs. McConkey. "I've often thought of her, left with her sisters and her father on her hands. Of course, they have everything to do with, but from what you say they don't keep a girl?"

"No," said Fremont. "Catherine looks after everything."

"But of course," Mrs. McConkey went on, "the other girls help. Even May is 'most grown, and Winifred is as big as she ever will be, so each does her share of the work, I s'pose."

"Well," said Fremont, "I don't see May doing much, but maybe she does. Winifred does the bedrooms, but she goes to the Institute and May has lessons. You see——"

"Yes, I see," said Mrs. McConkey. "They're like the man's horses, both willin' pullers—one willin' to pull it all an' the other willin' he should."

"No, ma," said Fremont, "I don't think it's that way. Winifred, now——"

"Wal," said ma, "it's girl-like if it is that way. I calculate the captain hain't got much gover'ment, an' it all rests on Catherine. It's a wonder they're such nice girls, with

no mother all these years. It's wonderful and shows what a splendid girl Catherine is. My heart jest goes out to that girl whenever I think of her; an' I pity her, too. Her girlhood is bein' jest swallowed up. I'm glad the other girls are good to her. When they git older an' have homes of their own, they'll begin to see what a great and Christlike thing their sister's done, bringin' 'em up. An' Catherine is the best-lookin' of the three, ain't she?"

Fremont was judgmatical in his answer. May would certainly be a pretty girl when she grew up and developed. Catherine was in the kitchen so much, a fellow couldn't quite tell, but she was a nice-looking girl. Her eyes weren't of that reddish brown like May's, but were more of a hazel, gray mottled with brown. She was taller than the other girls, but well formed, and, yes, folks called her pretty. Winifred's eyes now were a very deep blue, not the buttermilk blue of Fremont's, but blue like the cockle blossoms in the wheat. She was very slender, but almost as tall as Catherine. She was more inclined to think, and dream and to read, than Catherine.

"If she had that house to care for," said Mrs. McConkey, who saw accurately where Fremont's prepossessions lay, "she'd do her dreamin' on her feet! Nice girl, though."

Fremont suddenly went to bed. He could not continue a conversation with any one who could refer seriously to Winifred as just "a nice girl"—not even with his mother.

It was to something immeasurably superior to a merely nice girl, that he took his strange collection of manuscripts, the accumulation of years—the survivors of many a gloomy incineration. I am afraid that the lessons suffered that second week. The "neatherd" was baring his soul to Winifred. He showed her his poems, most of them fragments which would remind you of bits of Pollok or Young, or sometimes, Cowper. I suppose the old *McGuffey's Fifth Reader*—the one which had so much in it, including pass-

ages from translations of Homer—contained his models. There was one on Gettysburg which had the swing of Pope's redaction of Hector's attack on the Grecian walls, but it broke down right in the midst of Pickett's charge. There was a novel based on the Spirit Lake Massacre, in which Inkpadutah was part of the time almost a hero, and Henry Lott, the bad white man who had killed Indians and brought the war on, was compared to that old Ohio renegade, Simon Girty. This was a close imitation of Cooper, with the original verses at the top of the chapters, credited to "Old Play" and other authors. And there was one poem "To Winifred" which I might quote, but refrain—each stanza ending in some such passage as this:

"The day comes on, the day of Dread,
When light, love, joy are burièd;
The day when I no more shall see
Winifred!"

These writings seemed to Winifred very wonderful. To have them exhibited to her, read to her, by this strange, attractive boy, whom she had held in her mind since the day he had taken her into his buggy along the road to Crab-apple Grove, to whom her tender fancies had clung after she had heard him promise to help her father, whom she so wished to see again that she had gone out to him in the stubble-field with her father's letter, who had so magnificently won against all the opposition in the campaign on which so much depended for the Ashe family, that he was a sort of hero in the community and would surely—as she heard her father say over and over again—be a big man sometime, and who had shown her how superior to her he was in knowledge; who had now discovered to her his "Swan's Nest among the Reeds," the great secret of his ambitions which nobody else dreamed of; and who had

written her this beautiful poem, just as poets did in romances she had read! She took the poem and held it to her bosom.

"It is beautiful," she whispered. "And my name, too!"

"It is to you," said he.

"No, no!" she protested, just to hear him repeat it. "It can't be to me! No one would feel that way toward me! You don't feel——"

Fremont's arm had gone around her waist; she felt herself drawn close, very close to his breast, and her protest was silenced by his lips on hers. For the first time in his life Fremont had kissed a girl on the mouth. In his fancy he had reveled in kisses and embraces, in loves which were made up of just such communion of souls as this, culminating in just such caresses; but he had never known the ravishment of having the lips respond in the rapture of caress answering to caress. They were lost in their new-found ecstasy. Babes in the woods, they were, a wood in which there were no wild beasts, but only green lawns in sunny glades, a cottage by the stream, and a life of rapture in a world of success and plenty. Let us leave them there a moment.

CHAPTER II

THE SWAN'S NEST DISCOVERED

HOW old this story is to the world! How new it was to Winifred and Fremont! I suppose Ferdinand had played the prince with many a maid at the Court of Naples, so that he brought to the encounter with Miranda no such vacuum of innocence as that wherewith Fremont was handicapped or dowered in his courtship. As for Winifred, she had seen no Prospero, but her experience on what she would, if she had known enough, have called the Caliban side of society was greater by the swainhood of Monterey Centre than that of the heroine of *The Tempest;* but, girls, she was shockingly inexperienced, from your view-point. She was so much so that she might well have said, and would have done so had her un-Prospero-like father reproached her:

> "My affections
> Are then most humble; I have no ambition
> To see a goodlier man."

And Fremont saw in her not only all that she was, so pretty, so fond, so yielding, so young and fresh, but in addition everything he had dreamed into a million visions of lady-loves to be. She was Inez, the great lady by whose lost glove Carlos the Terrible had sworn. She was Dora and Agnes of *David Copperfield* rolled into one. She was the heroine he had rescued from bandits and savages. She was the little girl, growing up in disguise as a page, whose

secret indescribably revealed by her budding form, he a knight of high degree had divined, and whom he had induced to throw off her disguise and take on ladyhood at his hands. She was Godiva, to gaze profanely upon whom was to be deservedly blinded. She was "The Princess" and he that "Florian," fated not to know the substance from the shadow, who said of himself:

"And truly, waking dreams were, more or less,
An old and strange affection of the house.
Myself, too, had strange seizures, Heaven knows what:
On a sudden in the midst of men and day,
And while I walked and talked as heretofore,
I seemed to move among a world of ghosts,
And feel myself the shadow of a dream."

She was everything; and she was only the nucleus about which these figures in his poet's world of ghosts, gathered in a cloud of glories. The room given them for a study became a shrine. Please don't smile! I was hoping you might have been so once yourself.

It was now their "Swan's Nest among the Reeds," and was a profound secret. This was one of the things that made it so delicious. At meals, in the little family circle, Winifred and Fremont felt sure that they treated each other just as friends. They did not see the long looks of inquiry which Catherine bestowed upon them from time to time. They did not know that Catherine rebuked May severely once for saying to her that she believed that Fremont and Winnie were in love with each other.

"Why, they're only children," said Catherine. "Next thing we know you'll be so silly as to think of being in love yourself, May! You'd better attend to your lessons!" They never suspected that the boys in the Institute saw them walking side by side just close enough so that their hands sometimes touched, giving forth mutual electric

charges, and said that young McConkey was getting ready to foreclose his lien on a share of the county clerk's office. It never touched them!

And when they went into their study they conscien-sciously began each day their work. Fremont was not so brilliant in the classroom as formerly, except in the literature work, where he was more perfervid than ever. This change in him resulted, perhaps, from the fact that they sat on the sofa almost every night until after the others had all retired, with their arms about each other, and their lips so close that the pauses in their conversation were all kisses.

They talked of the future, when he would be a great author. They did not quite know where they would live; but when Fremont spoke of some island, where they could be all alone, watching the league-long roller thundering on the beach, and listening to lapse of billow, "hum of bee, and nut-fruit dropping from the tree," Winifred embraced him and agreed that this should be their life.

Sometimes he would be sad, just for a change, and say that it would be a long, long time before he could win this place in the world, and she would resent this preposterous idea.

"Why," said she, "these things you have written are beautiful, beautiful! Nobody can write better verses or stories, nobody! All we have to do is to send them to people who print such things, and if they have any sense, they'll send you lots of money. And we won't need very much. I'll be so saving! I'll look out for you in every way so you won't have anything to do but to think and think, and write and write and be a great man! And if I come to you once in a long, long while, and interrupt you just a little bit—like this!—you won't be so awful cross to me, will you?"

And then, of course, this very sane and conservative

deliverance was interrupted by Fremont in a manner which must remain a mystery to you. After a week or so of this, during which he made his week-end visit to his home, and left his mother wondering and half guessing why his hands had such fits of trembling, and why he was so distraught, or as she put it to herself, why his wits were wool-gathering all the time, Fremont took up with Winifred his determination to go to college. He had forgotten all about it for days. He told her how ignorant he was; and how all great writers had gone to college—

"Ignorant!" she exclaimed. "You! Why, you are better in all your recitations than any of the boys in the Institute who've been to college!"

Why did his heart suddenly seem to lose a beat, and his conscience condemn him afterward for treason to Winifred? Ah! it was because of her failure to see that this sort of thing in which he excelled was not culture—not the culture that made poets and authors. It was the first little imperfection in their relations. It was the first, almost, of their relations, except those of embraces and kisses.

He might have told her, if the words had fortunately come to him, just what sort of culture it is which makes great writers; but the words did not come. All he could do was to be just a little more fervent in his love-making to prove that he had not felt that momentary and rudimentary impulse which he had felt, of criticism of her failure to understand what he did not understand but knew—if I make myself clear—and to assume that he must go to college if he was to be the thing for which God had intended him. And then he saw that Winifred had suddenly gone cold and pale.

"How long will it take, darling?" she asked.

"Well," said he bravely, "I am not quite ready to enter, but I think I can get ready in a year. And then it will

take four years to get through, if I do not have to stay out and work for money to pay my expenses."

"Five years!" she gasped. "Oh, Fremont, my love! Five years, and maybe more. And what of me all that time? I can't stand it, Fremont! I can't stand it to lose you all that time! I can't! I can't!"

Of course this could not endure, this secrecy of theirs. As well try to conceal the eruption of Vesuvius. As well make a secret of the sunrise. As well say "Silence!" to the thunder, or draw the blinds against the lightning. The earth in the vineyards begins to send out its heat; the flood of light breaks over the horizon; the electric thrill passes through the atmosphere—and the world knows. Our lovers would have been detected earlier, if there had been an experienced woman in the house; but Catherine's mind recoiled from the confrontation of the situation with all the modesty which Winifred would have felt had their places been reversed. They were old-fashioned girls, you must remember, who had been reared the one by the other. If Captain Ashe had not looked upon Fremont so completely as an outsider, as a mere political tool, as a perfect greenhorn, and if he had not been so busy driving the county roads night and day trying to defeat the machinations of the few Democrats in the county who were scheming to repeat that Anti-Monopoly movement of 1874, by putting up a ticket to defeat him, under the perfidious title of the "Reform Ticket" he would have seen how the land lay much earlier.

One night he came home after midnight. He had been in a far part of the county and had done a good day's work. He was cheerful. He and the other nominees of the party had made clear to the Republican voters who were showing interest in this reform ticket, several things: That it was really a Democratic scheme, and, therefore, a "Copperhead" plot; that all there was to it was the sore-

headedness of a few disorganizers who called themselves "Republicans," most of whom had run for county office and got beat, and were out to ruin where they could not rule; and, third (and on this point the captain and his fellow nominees were most impressive) the "Reform Ticket," while it might raise hell, could not win. Why, Raws Upright, Doc Bliven, Henderson L. Burns and the two factions generally, who locked horns at the convention, were working as brothers for victory. And the argument that the bolters could not but help the Democrats to victory had been the clincher. The captain knew that the danger was past. The election would be a mere formality. He would take charge of the office of clerk of the courts on January first, if he lived to that day. And he felt like living. He was happy. Selling real estate, paying taxes for non-residents, making a few abstracts of title and the like, had been mighty poor picking for years—ever since the panic of 1873. True, things were looking up a little, but a good office was a sure thing, and he was going to have one as sure as shooting.

And as he approached the door, across the blue-grass sod instead of the wooden sidewalk, he saw a dim light shining out from the parlor window, and another glimmering through under the hall door, left there by Catherine for him when he came. His footfalls on the porch were muffled by the mat, the door was unlocked for him, and he walked in silently, thinking that he would have to speak to Winifred about leaving the light in the parlor when she finished her work, and wasting kerosene all night. He pushed open the parlor door and stepped in to blow out the light. The room seemed empty at first—and then he heard a little rustling over at the sofa, and looked!

I vow, I so sympathize with Fremont McConkey, even after all these years, that it is hard to go on with this! Any man over six feet high, who feels that he must rise

from a low horsehair sofa with any dignity, under the disadvantage of having to get his legs under him, is to be pitied, and when he has on his lap something upward of a hundred pounds of lovely femininity, all unconscious of the intrusion, the face of which is buried in his breast, and the arms entwined with his—well, I leave it to you as to the utter helplessness of the embarrassment of the situation.

"Winifred Ashe!"

Winifred struggled to her feet. Fremont humbly rose by placing his hands on the edge of the sofa after his sweet incubus had removed itself. He turned pale, while Winifred blushed redder and redder until she flamed.

"What does this mean?" demanded the captain.

"It means," said Fremont, "that I love Winifred, and that she loves me! We—we love each other, Captain Ashe!"

"Winnie, I'm ashamed of you! I—I won't have any more of this foolishness, d'ye hear? Not a bit of it. Ain't you ashamed?"

Winifred turned to Fremont, and went to him, her arms opened to embrace him. He took her to his breast, and stood facing the astonished captain.

"No," she said, turning her face as far toward her father as was possible, "I'm not ashamed! I'm proud! Fremont and I are going to be married!"

"Married!" The captain gave this that upward inflection which raises an unanswerable question, and then added with the falling inflection which nevertheless answers it in the only possible way. "Married! I think I see you! Stop that huggin' an' si' down, both of yeh!"

They obeyed. Fremont seated himself on a chair, and Winifred began dragging another over toward him.

"Leave that chair where it is," said the captain, "and sit in it. Now I've got a few words to say to wind this thing up. This is nothing but puppy love, and—"

"No," she said, "I'm not ashamed! I'm proud."

"Sir!" exclaimed Fremont, who felt that he was making a very unheroic impression, "I can not permit even you to use such an expression when referring to the supreme passion of my life, and to that which in spite of my unworthiness, this lady has bestowed upon me!"

"The hell you say!" This burst from the captain, in spite of the fact that he was rather impressed with this high-falutin' speech of the boy. "Wal, we wun't argue about what kind of love it is. It can't go on."

"It will go on forever, sir!" said Fremont fervently.

"Forever!" echoed Winifred, looking proudly at Fremont.

"Bosh!" retorted the captain. "What you got to marry on? I'm a friend of yourn, Fremont, an' I want you to behave so I can keep on bein' your friend. But you're both children. An' there will be other plans for Winnie here. You're a good, respectable boy, an' your folks are nice folks enough, but you must remember that the Ashe family will move in different circles. A country schoolteacher don't earn enough to marry any one on, an' the only other way you've got to make a livin' is to farm it. You've got no land, an' land has gone up to ten to fifteen dollars an acre, an' that's too high for a young feller to buy it an' pay for it out of the crops. Winnie would be miserable on a farm. An' if you ask me, I think you'll never succeed as a farmer. You've got some gift of gab, an' you're a good teacher they say, but you'll never amount to much when you throw away a good office as you did the county superintendency the other day. That don't look good to me for a future son-in-law. Now this usin' this room together is a thing of the past. No more of it. I shouldn't have thought it of you, Fremont! I put it to you if it ain't wrong. Winnie, go to bed! And now, Mr. McConkey, that I've used plain words to you which I know you'll see to be reasonable, we'll leave you to the

studies that I'm sure you've been neglectin' in this that I'm simply goin' to treat as puppy love—nothing but puppy love. Go to your room, Winnie, an' remember what I've said!"

Winifred ran to Fremont with open arms, and was taken into his and kissed. Then she ran to the door—and into the arms of Catherine, who had softly come down. The look which Catherine bestowed on the group Fremont never forgot. To her father it was reproachful, and as nearly contemptuous as it was possible for a loving daughter to make it. To Fremont it propounded a searching question—one which he did not understand, but to which he felt bound to find an answer. On Winifred she bestowed a look of ineffable sympathy mingled with a love almost maternal. She put her arm about Winifred's waist, and took her up the stairs, whispering low words in her ear. Fremont sat down in the parlor alone.

He sat a long time, apparently thinking of nothing concrete or definite. Then he seemed to have made up his mind that, having betrayed the hospitality of the Ashe family, he was bound to leave the house. So he went to his room and packed his belongings for removal. Mechanically he looked about to see if his preparations were complete, and the empty box in which he had brought his books set in motion the muscles that took him back to the parlor, where the lamp was still burning which had brought on him this great calamity of discovery and repudiation. He gathered up his books, and tied them together. As he stood with them in his hand, looking about the room in which his wonderful experience had come to him, and noting, as one notes common things when going to the scaffold, that the first light of morning was shining in at the window, he turned and found Catherine Ashe standing in the doorway. With a pitiful smile on her face she came to him and took him by the hand.

"Sit down, Fremont," said she. "I want to talk with you."

Fremont put his bundle of books on the table. Catherine, seated beside him, now saw how pale and haggard he had become in this short time, gazed in his face with tender pity, and laid her hand on his shoulder. I think Fremont could have endured burning at the stake with as much fortitude as any one, but his tears were always too ready to flow at the appeal of poetry, sublimity or tenderness, and this show of sympathy was too much for him. He bowed his face in his hands and sobbed.

"I can't leave without seeing Winifred again!" said he.

"I heard what father said to you—the last of it," said Catherine, patting him softly on the shoulders, "and I wanted to tell you that I think it was a hard and cruel thing to say, and that it wasn't true. He seems to feel that because he is going to be elected to that office, we're going to be great people, but I know and he knows that your folks are just as good as we are, and that you yourself know more in a minute than any of us will ever find out."

"No," replied Fremont, his voice quivering.

"Yes," said Catherine, with conviction. "And you mustn't feel hard toward us because he said that silly thing. Try to forget it for the sake of the rest of us—and for father's sake, too; for the time will come when he will be ashamed of it, if he isn't already."

"I have already forgotten it," replied Fremont. "I didn't notice it!"

"The worst thing he said," Catherine went on, "was about these offices and nominations and things. That was ungrateful in father. He oughtn't to have forgotten that this nomination which he thinks so much of, he wouldn't have had at all if it hadn't been for you. You gave it to

him. I should think that would give you the right to go with a girl of even the lofty Ashe family!"

There was scorn in Catherine's voice as she said this. Fremont, who found it difficult to follow what she was saying, caught this note.

"I wouldn't take Winifred," he stated, "as a reward for such work. I want to put my case on the ground that we love each other, and that I'll try to be everything in the world in my power to be worthy of her. That political work! I hate it when I think of Winifred."

"Yes," said Catherine, "I can see that you sometimes think it wasn't the loftiest thing you could be doing; but it was the work that father needed, and you gave it to him. I wasn't so very proud of your doing it. But when father said that you were a ninny for not taking that office away from Mr. Burns when you might have had it, he hurt my feelings. That was the thing you did that pleased me. It was an honest and unselfish thing to do—an honorable thing—there wasn't another young man in the county, that I know anyhow, who wouldn't have been tempted to break his word, and disappoint poor Mr. Burns, who needs that office to take care of his sick wife. And to think that father so far forgot himself as to speak slightingly of the noblest thing I have heard of in all my life—among men, anyhow!"

She paused here and began on another key.

"But what he said about your marrying Winnie was true—only he didn't say it as he should. He was excited and surprised. I don't think Winnie ought to marry anybody—not for a long time, anyhow. Nobody knows better than I how sweet and loving she is; but I don't think she is fit to take the responsibility of being your wife. She couldn't live without me, Fremont! I—I—I can't tell you what I mean—but I wish you and she could bring your-

selves to give each other up—for a long time, anyhow—for your own good as well as hers!"

"It will be for her to say!" replied Fremont. "I can't leave without seeing her again!"

"You'll see her often," said Catherine. "And you're not going away till the Institute is over, just as you planned. Father doesn't want you to, either. How could he explain it, after what you did for him—gave him this office he feels so uppish about! We just want you to give up this—this—this that's been going on in this room, and be friends with all of us—just friends—with Winifred and all of us. You can see Winifred with the rest of us, and walk to the Institute with her, just the same—but that's all. Can't you do this, Fremont?"

"It's for Winifred to say," repeated Fremont.

"Well, then it's settled! See, I am unpacking your books. Go and unpack your other things. Winifred told me she wants you to stay. And now Bridget must get breakfast. It's morning!"

CHAPTER III

AN ENGAGEMENT WITH THE STARS

IF CAPTAIN ASHE had been better acquainted with his daughters, it might not have gone on as it did. And it was Catherine's fault—no, it was the dear girl's virtue—that he was ignorant of the real characters of his girls. When their mother had passed away, their friends wondered what poor Captain Ashe would do to keep the family together; but young as Catherine was, she solved the problem. She kept it together. She was the wonder of the neighborhood. The woman who did their washing, the dressmaker who taught her to cut and baste and sew, and the store-keepers and farmers from whom she bought supplies were her chief admirers. While she was growing up in the process of mothering the younger girls, seeing that they went to school and did their lessons, looking after their clothes and ruling them gently and lovingly with such success that the captain's heart swelled with pride at the consciousness that he was making a success under difficulties, she was a marvel to the town and community; and then every one became accustomed to it, and took the model management of the Ashe household as a matter of course.

Catherine was now twenty-one, and most people had forgotten the time when as a girl in short dresses she had risen to the command of this house, and had managed so well. It had become an old story not only to herself and

her sisters and her father, but to all the country-side. And the captain had been so freed from the necessity of studying the temperaments of these young girls that he blindly trusted in Winifred's subjection to an authority against which, owing to Catherine's mild rule, the younger girls had never rebelled.

If you will look about you you will observe this aloofness between parents and children to be a very common thing, even where they seem very intimate. Complete understanding is a difficult thing. It requires thought and study, and study is an inconvenient thing to carry on.

And Catherine, while she understood Winifred very well, did not understand the crisis in Winifred's soul. They had never had any secrets from each other. If she and Fremont kept on wanting to be married, why Catherine, sighing at the thought of it, could see no reason why it should not ultimately come to pass. Young people always married in Iowa, then as now, if they wanted to do so. Parents very seldom persisted in opposition. It was really the young folks' own business. She had not heard that outcry of Winifred's that she couldn't live without Fremont. But you who remember that it was Winifred's mother who so long ago sent to the little boy out on the prairie by Uncle Steve Lawless, the three years' files of the *New York Ledger,* may not be surprised at it. Winifred was as hungry for romance as was Fremont.

So those walks permitted by Captain Ashe to and from the Institute were not characterized by any diminution of the puppy love as the captain called it. They raised the fever of it. The electric charges which passed from hand to hand as the two young "ninnies" walked along together were even more thrilling, for the current had no other means of discharge. Any electrician can explain this to you by analogy. The exchange of loving speeches, the laying of plans, all in the most casual manner and in

ordinary tones, the saying of "Darling, darling!" or "I love you! I love you!" while the glance is directed at some uninteresting object in the street, the sudden passage at the meeting of a stranger of the impassioned speech to some trivial matter relating to the Institute work. While all this was so far from obvious that Captain Ashe said to Catherine that the children were showing more sense than he was afraid they might, it really was just the draught of the air of dalliance which made the fire all the hotter, so that when Winnie and Fremont happened to meet in the passage in the Ashe residence, as was inevitable sometimes, they rushed into each other's arms as armature goes to poles in a magnet. And then Fremont would feel that he had violated his "parole," and spend a miserable night.

The Sunday before the last week of the Institute, Fremont, spending his week-end at home, mounted his horse and rode off alone. His mother saw him take the road toward the Blake neighborhood over north of Vandemark's Folly Slew, and attributed the visit to Fremont's new political work. He had a long talk with Bill Blake, his old crony of duck-shooting days, and the young fellow who had lighted the match which had brought in the Ashe retainers at the Vandemark Township caucus. Evidently something very esoteric was under discussion, for the conference took place in a lonely spot to which they went on their horses. Bill rode a part of the way home with Fremont.

"I'll be there," said he as they parted. "You don't need to be afraid I'll go back on you. An' you don't need to be skeered that them horses can't make the trip, either."

"My whole life," said Fremont, "may depend on it!"

What can this be upon which Fremont's life may depend? It seems to make no difference in the conduct of so much of it as is embraced in the next week's program, for Fremont and Winnie still moved in their own sky as

lonely as two clouds charged with electricity of opposite polarity, and exchanged those discharges aforementioned. No difference at all, unless one take note of the fact that on Friday morning, Fremont arose early, and when he was going out before breakfast, and Catherine called him back, he explained that they all had to take the examinations that day for their next year's teacher's certificates, and that he had some work to do, and would not stay to breakfast. Catherine made him stay and take a cup of coffee and such food as he would accept; but he seemed to lack appetite.

"Winnie's taking the examinations," said Cathie, "and is going to take her lunch, so she can put in the whole day."

"Yes," said Fremont. "And I won't be here to dinner, either."

"I'm glad to get rid of all of you," said Catherine. "It will give me a chance to do something I've been putting off for a month. I'll put up a lunch for both of you and let Winnie take it."

Winnie was making those sounds which indicated that she was coming down-stairs. Fremont hastily took his departure without waiting to speak to her. Catherine wondered if there had been something like a difference between them. She suspected that she was right in this surmise, when Winifred clung to her and cried at kissing her good-by. Evidently, she and Fremont had had some misunderstanding. There was a coolness between them. Catherine looked after her little sister and sighed at her own helplessness, as Winifred walked off up the street toward the schoolhouse, going very early, swinging her dinner basket by its handle. Always before she had been able to comfort Winnie. But this time had to come, she supposed.

The day of examinations was a stressful one for the teachers and the would-be teachers, and one in which

crabbedness and sternness developed in the instructors who had been so complaisant from their thrones of ineffable wisdom during the Institute. Examinations forced a new program, and this in its turn caused confusion. Seats were changed. Nobody knew where to look for any one else. Those in the "D" class who did not expect to be teachers, or to try for certificates, dropped out and those who remained went into other rooms.

Anybody sought for was difficult to find and Winifred and Fremont, so far as the record shows, were not sought. Nobody missed them so far as we know. Nobody saw them take separate ways early that Friday morning to a place just outside the little town, where an old two-seated, spring wagon, provided with a canvas cover, stood by the roadside facing west. If it had been seen it would not have attracted much notice, for such conveyances used by "movers" were not uncommon. No one would have been surprised when a pretty young girl came along and after speaking a moment to the farmer-like young man in charge, climbed into the back seat behind the cover—except that she was rather elegantly dressed for the daughter of an emigrant on the move. But when another young man, tall and a little stooped, joined the party and on reaching the spot, at once climbed in and disappeared in the dark backward and abysm of the rig, one might have been surprised at his holiday appearance, and the speed which the equipage developed as it passed over the next knoll to the west. Bill Blake, you will remember, had said that Fremont was not to be "skeered" that them horses couldn't make the trip.

It was a very humble-looking turnout. Bill Blake was sufficient of a gentleman in spite of his reputation for "do-lessness" as to look forward over the horses' ears all the time, in spite of the deep silence back of him, and to take it for granted that he had not lost his load. His

load was a block hewn bodily out of Paradise. Winifred was palpitant with bliss and anxiety for the immediate, but not for the remote future. The further reaches of life were all roseate for both. For the first time Fremont McConkey was luxuriating in recklessness. He had been rather pathetically oppressed with the problems of life, heretofore; and as for the care-free existence of boyhood, that had come to an end about the time he began snaring gophers to keep them from digging up the corn. Life was real, life was earnest for the children as well as for the men and women who had struggled through the forests for a century or so, and emerged into the light of the prairies, which they might have been so pessimistic in those years of adjustment, as to call the "blight." It was only while he was a pirate, or a knight, or an explorer, or an Indian fighter, or a youth winning his way up to the hand of the banker's daughter, or a boy gold digger or something of the sort, that he had been spiritually free from the economic pressure and the social blight which a poet feels in an atmosphere of ignorance and wheat disease and low prices and lack of fuel for the kitchen stove and the spirit. But on this morning, he thought only that the greatest thing in the world was the fact, so divinely attested, that Winifred could not live without him and would die if he went away from her for all those years. What did he care for education and ways of supporting her? She herself was a liberal education. When she said that he could write such wonderful things, she had been sweetly mistaken, except for the inspiration which she herself gave to him. There was nothing which he could not do with her. He told her so and stopped her lips so that she had but one way of assenting.

She was afraid they would be followed and insisted that he look out at the back once in a while to see; but he was free from even this care. He could meet and over-

come all obstacles, for her. "A chieftain to the Highlands bound" might well fear that his blood would stain the heather if the armed men approaching should overtake him and his winsome lady, but Fremont would have welcomed pursuers. Never before had he attained such a pitch of exaltation. It seemed scarcely an hour, when their horses stopped steaming before the path leading up to the door of the little court-house of the next county west. I am told that the horses were never quite the same again.

"Do I have to go in?" asked Winifred.

Fremont looked at Bill for advice.

"No," replied Bill, "not unless they ask to see you. But I'll have to back up what Freem says. The team'll stand, but you might walk up an' down on the sidewalk an' look after 'em while we're in there."

They left Winifred pacing up and down in something like a panic. They entered the dingy door into a dirty hall, and seeing "County Clerk" on a half-open door they went into a dusty office where a grizzled man with that beard which came out of the Civil War and was named for General Burnside, was writing industriously in a huge book with a scratchy pen. Why did he not look up at once when they came in? How could he fail to know that this was the greatest event that had ever occurred in his office! Well, perhaps this callousness might be overlooked; but the senile old groveler never changed expression when Bill Blake told him that they wanted "a pair of licents."

"Marriage license?" he observed, half yawning—but he asked the question of Fremont, be it observed. Fremont nodded.

The veteran looked about and tumbled over a lot of papers, and called into the next room asking some one named "Lije" where he put the licenses, and "Lije" came into the room with a pad of blanks in his hand, which he handed to the veteran. When he saw Fremont wiping

the sweat from his brow, he winked solemnly at him and went back into his den. And those blanks might have been blank checks!

"Bride's name?" asked the veteran, after trying his pen on the margin—and he asked the question of Fremont, though Bill had asked for a "pair of licents."

"Winifred Ashe," said Fremont—and waited for the general eruption of things which it seemed must follow the demand of any man for the right to wed this angel.

"One or two *n's?*" asked the man with the burnsides.

"One," replied Fremont.

"How d'ye spell 'Ashe'?" he asked, and Fremont marveled at the continued existence of a nation in which even the better classes were so ignorant!

"Age of bride?" was then asked.

"Nineteen," replied Fremont.

"Sure she's over eighteen?" inquired the clerk, looking steadily at Fremont.

"Quite sure," he answered. The clerk wrote it down.

"Residence of bride?" And so on with the vital statistics of the groom also. Everything signed by necessary parties. License signed and twitched off the pad so carelessly that it was torn a little.

"Two dollars," said the clerk—was it over? thought Fremont. Could this be all of this? "And say," said the clerk, "you'll want a certificate, you know. Now I sell a mighty pretty blank for the preacher or the justice of the peace to fill out. Look at this."

It was a marvelously ornate blank made for framing with oval places for the photographs of the wedded pair. It was all gilt and pierced hearts and orange blossoms and turtle doves, with blank lines for the signatures of the officiating functionary and the witnesses and the parties themselves. "It would be a mighty pretty thing for the settin'-room wall," said the clerk who made a little money

on the side in this traffic in marriage certificate blanks. He made his bit out of Fremont McConkey, who emerged from the door of the court-house to see Winifred talking with some one down on the sidewalk. Fremont hastened down, determined to ask this person where the nearest minister of the Gospel could be found—and it was Elder Skeels, the pastor of the Baptist Church in Lithopolis and the shepherd of the flock to which Mrs. McConkey belonged.

"Ah!" said he, as with his practised eye he noted the tell-tale documents in Fremont's hands, "now I see what this young lady did not feel free to make clear. And now, where, Fremont?"

"Elder," said Fremont, "I want you to help me. We—Winifred and I—want to—to—get—"

"Married," supplied Elder Skeels. "Have you selected the minister who is to have the honor and pleasure of joining in the holy bonds of matrimony such a fine young couple?"

"We want you to select him," said Fremont pleadingly.

"Please do!" urged Winifred. "Why, you're a minister! Won't you do it, please?"

"I should be glad to officiate at the sacrament," said Mr. Skeels. "I think that Mrs. Boggs, wife of our pastor in this town will be willing to allow us to use her parlor. Why, she's an old friend of you both. I have heard her speak of you, Fremont; and she was a friend of your mother, Miss Ashe. She was Mary Livermore who taught you, Fremont, when you learned to read. Please walk along with me. Why, this will be quite a gathering of old friends!"

Bill took his horses to a stable to feed and water them; and made such haste that he was at the house of Elder Boggs by the time greetings had been exchanged with Mrs. Boggs, and Mr. Skeels had read the license and questioned

them as to whether or not their parents had consented to the wedding. After Fremont had explained the situation, which he did quite candidly, and assured the elder that if he would not perform the ceremony, they would hie themselves at once to the nearest justice of the peace, there was still further delay. The elder shrank from proceeding. Winifred cut the Gordian knot by asking for her hat so that they might seek the magistrate, starting in panic when Bill Blake knocked at the door in the fear that they had been followed, and that the arrival was that of her angry father.

"Under these circumstances," then observed the elder, "we will proceed. Marriage is a civil contract in law, but it is also a sacrament; and I believe I am doing God's work in adding the sanctions of religion to that of the statutes in such cases made and provided."

How comforting is a neat little speech in a crisis! The elder was quite happy in the memory of this legal phrase so well employed, and the company was solemn where solemnity was proper, and jolly where merriment was in order.

How did Mary Livermore Boggs (whose son has just won fame as a Harvard quarter-back) know that Fremont had no ring? Fremont's eyes grew dim as she slipped into his hand a plain gold band which she said had been her mother's, but which it would make her happy if the best pupil she had ever had would accept and put on the finger of the sweet daughter of her old friend. It was Mrs. Boggs, too, who suggested to Elder Skeels that he use that form of the ceremony containing the "With this ring I thee wed," which was a thing hitherto unknown in the elder's career as a minister. We did not wed with rings very often in those days; but the memory of it was an agreeable one to Fremont. It sounded like a passage from one of his romances.

Mrs. Boggs hugged Winifred and wept. Her children, all three of them, kissed both Winifred and Fremont, and laughed as if at some great secret. Bill Blake kissed the bride and blushed as redly as she did, and wished them much joy; and then they all sat down to a nice little supper after waiting unavailingly for the return of Elder Boggs who was driving across the country from Fort Dodge. During the supper Elder Skeels began tentative approaches in the direction of trading horses with Bill. It added greatly to the prospects of the success of a preacher in those days if he was a good judge of a horse.

"Which way you going home?" he asked.

"Through Lithopolis," said Bill.

"Well," said the elder, "you won't make it any further to-night. If you put the team up in Lawless' livery stable, I'll bring mine around to-morrow and we'll talk trade whether we trade or not. Do you know, Fremont, that your Uncle Steve has quit driving stage, and has bought Mr. Upright's stable in Lithopolis?"

This was one of the things that had happened during the time when Fremont's mind had been surcharged with Winifred, and he did not know of it. He remembered enough, however, to enable him to say that he knew, now that the other railroad was going through, they were abandoning the stage line.

"And Fremont," said Winifred, "is going to take me up to show Aunt Zuby and Uncle Steve what a bad grandniece they have!"

She looked so divine as she thus, for the first time, told the world that Fremont's people were now her people, that Fremont simply was forced to squeeze her hand under the table, even if it did cause Bill Blake to say: "None o' that, now, Freem!" This witticism fell so flat in the very prim circle in which they found themselves, that Bill felt obliged to withdraw, which he did, saying that if they made it to

Lithopolis that night, they'd better be pulling out, and he would go and get their conveyance.

And then came the drive of only a few miles to Lithopolis, during which our young married pair were again plunged into the apparent darkness, but the real illumination of the covered carriage. They drove to Uncle Steve's house, got out and knocked at the door.

"It's me, Fremont McConkey!" said he, as Uncle Steve opened the door. "And this is my wife, your niece, Winifred, Uncle Steve. We've come to make you a little visit!"

Uncle Steve took Winifred by the hand and led her into the sitting-room. During the journey, Aunt Zuby took possession of her other hand, with a smile on her face which to any unpractised physiognomist would have expressed the idea that she had suddenly had her share in the Trinity Church property paid her in cash. To Aunt Zuby an unexpected wedding was like the turning up of buried treasure. Uncle Steve put his hand under Winifred's chin and looked at her so long and intently that she showed the capacity to blush had not quite passed from her.

"Wal," said Uncle Steve, with a rising inflection, and then, "Wal!" with a falling one, and then, continuing with "w'l, Freem, if anybody calls you up any time in the middle o' the night an' tells you that your Uncle Steve says you're a fool, you tell 'em that Uncle Steve's took it back! By Golding's bow-key, it's little Winnie Ashe!"

Winnie was smothered with Aunt Zuby's embraces, and assured that though they had never seen each other, Steve had often spoke of her, and she was proud to be Winnie's aunt, and Winnie must be tired, and she would take her right to her room and bring her a cup of tea and a mite to eat, and Steve, do have Fremont take his things off and be comfortable!

And Fremont took his things off—and was comfortable.

As much so as a man can be under such circumstances. He saw Winifred brought down again even though it was so late, after she was a little freshened up, so that Uncle Steve would not always remember her as looking so horrid. They took tea and cookies and strawberry jam, though they were not hungry. They all laughed when they looked in the luncheon basket Winifred had taken with her in the morning, and found that they had forgotten to eat.

"Gettin' married," said Uncle Steve, "allus throws me off my feed; though as a gineral rule, I hain't no antithapy to vittles, as Mis' Absalom Frost says. N'r to marriage, either. My rule's allus been to git married early and stay married. I hope it takes as a life ailment with you, children."

The lights go out one by one in the little river town of Lithopolis, but there is more excitement in the prairie village of Monterey. The device so simply hit upon by Fremont for transportation to the nearest place where a marriage license could be obtained, that of calling upon his old chum, Bill, to provide it, was astonishingly successful in delaying the alarm and then creating mystification. Captain Ashe came in from his canvass of the electorate rather late, but when the supper was laid, Fremont and Winifred were, as the reader knows, mounted on their cloud somewhere between the parsonage of Elder Boggs and the home of Uncle Steve Lawless.

"I think the examinations must be pretty hard," remarked Catherine as she lighted the kerosene lamp for the table. "I expect that Winnie will be all tired out when she comes."

"S'pose so," remarked the captain. "All foolishness takin' the examination anyhow. She won't teach even if she passes. How was she feelin' at noon?"

"She took their dinners in a basket," said Catherine. "I haven't seen her since morning."

"Well," said the captain, "riding these prairies in the service of the Lord is hungry work. Le's not wait."

While he was not waiting, Catherine walked up toward the schoolhouse.

"There are no lights in the schoolhouse," said she, on returning. "They must be through up there. They'll be here in a moment."

Captain Ashe moved back from the table. The vision of Winifred and Fremont strolling about in the gathering darkness irritated him. It was an approach to the violation of the paternal prohibition. His uneasiness and vexation increased by a geometrical progression at five-minute intervals. He said nothing, but Catherine saw the vapors of the coming volcanic eruption about his usually placid head.

"I s'pose," said the irrepressible May, as she calmly finished her dessert, "that they're lallygagging around somewhere trying to be in love with each other."

"That's about all I want to hear from you!" said her father.

"Well," said May, "see if I'm not right! That's all I have to say! Why don't they come? It's dark."

The captain walked out on the street and strolled up and down, fully expecting to find May's irritating diagnosis of the case confirmed at every street corner about which he peered. People were coming out from their houses after their evening meals, and going, in the village way, to their offices. The captain met Professor Gardiner on the street with a great package of examination papers under his arm.

"Well," said the captain casually, "how did the examinations go, Professor?"

"All through," he replied. "Can't tell how well they're done until we get through these"—tapping the papers.

"Our two members of the class," remarked the cap-

tain, "must have found the thing pretty hard. They're not home yet."

"No?" queried Mr. Gardiner; "why, everybody was through by five o'clock. Let's see, your two were your daughter—"

"Winnie," supplied the captain. "And young McConkey who is staying with us."

"Why, they neither of them took the examination," said the professor. "I noticed that when I checked the Institute list against the names entered for the examination. They haven't been here to-day."

"Haven't they?"

There was something noteworthy in the captain's way of saying this, but caution modified his manner in what followed. "I've been out on the road all day, and just got back. Probably come home long ago. I wanted to ask 'em how they got along."

There's no way of keeping such a secret. The captain had not been making his cautious inquiries for ten minutes, when the word was passing from mouth to mouth that Fremont McConkey had run off with Ashe's second daughter, Winnie. The agitated father's inquiries at the livery stable as to whether they got a team there let the cat out of the bag.

When he finally returned to his home hoping that they had really been only "lallygagging" according to May's acute surmise, he found that neighbor women were there talking with Catherine, their presence being betrayed by their hurried exit from the house by way of the back door.

"Have they come?"

"No," said Catherine.

Captain Ashe was fond of telling stories of his war experiences. He often confessed that he ran away at the first battle of Bull Run and when any one jocularly criticized him for his informal retreat, his justification always

was that, "Them that didn't run are there yet!" He was fond, also, of telling how one Confederate general—he always said it was General Cleburne and "I tell it as 'twas told to me"—urged his men forward in their assault on the Union lines by yelling, "Give 'em hell, boys. Give 'em hell!" Now, the Confederate General Polk, the captain always explained, was a bishop, and was embarrassed by the limitations of a bishop's vocabulary. But he did the best he could. Placing himself at the head of his troops, he waved his sword and hurling the gray thunderbolt upon the wavering blue line, he shouted: "Come on, boys! Come on! Give them what Pat Cleburne says!"

I have told this tale because I wished to spare the reader what Captain Ashe said when he had become convinced that our two dwellers in paradise had eloped, and couldn't find out how, by rail or highway, they had departed. His language was copied in this great battle with Fate, not from the speech of General Polk, but from the other general's expressions—or perhaps he and Cleburne borrowed from a common source.

Catherine sat long and listened to him. He would never speak to either of them again. Winnie had made her bed, and she might lie in it. He would see whether a girl of his could make him an object to be poked fun at, and then crawl back and have everything overlooked. He would be indefinitely and torridly uncomfortable if he would overlook it. And so on for a very long time, it seemed to Catherine. And for a girl of his to marry that "great booby, ninnyhammer and clodhopper" just at the time, too, when she was going to have a chance to go in real society! Well, it was the end of things with both of them. They could go their way, and the captain would go his. And not the captain alone, but all the family.

"I forbid you ever seeing either of them again, or speaking to them or writing to them!" shouted the cap-

tain. "D'ye hear? And you tell May what I say. It's for her, too! I'll show 'em! D'ye hear, Catherine?"

Catherine was sitting up very straight in her chair. The tears which she had shed when the real state of the case had come to her, were all dried now. Her eyes were shining with a light which her father had seldom seen there. At the second "D'ye hear?" she answered, in a low calm voice which by its very tone seemed to end the conference:

"Yes, father, I hear, and I tell you now that I shall speak to Winnie and to Fremont the very first chance I get, and as often as I can. I shall see them every day all my life, if I can. You talk very foolishly, father. You talk of Fremont as if he were beneath us, but you know that he is smarter than any of us ever were or ever will be; and as for his family, I like them, though he's the best of them, and they are just as good people as any of the Ashes, or the Smiths or the McFarlands, or any of our connections. And if you think you can get any credit in Monterey County by this high and mighty stand toward a boy whom you made do your underhand political work for you, and who did it so well that you owe the office you're going to get, to him, why, I think you're fooled, father. But as for me, I'm for Fremont, no matter who's against him. I love Winnie, and I say that Fremont is good enough for her, or for any Ashe girl, or any girl in Monterey County or the state of Iowa! That's what I say. And I'll go to my little sister just as soon as I can find out where she is! There!"

And Catherine, after waiting for her father's reply in vain, swept grandly from the room with tears dripping on her heaving breast.

Yes, the lights went quietly out one by one in Lithopolis. The stars rose and saw through the livery stable window Bill Blake dropping to sleep after overcoming the temptation to get the village boys together to shivaree the bride and groom. It seemed a fool thing to let this opportunity

slip, as well as a violation of a grand old custom, ending in something to drink as the price of quiet. Something soft in Bill's heart caused him to forego the drink and the standing which he would have gained in Lithopolis.

The stars smiled in approval. Finally the last light went out in the spare room of Aunt Zuby and Uncle Steve. And the stars looked down solemnly and exchanged glances at this oldest of all mysteries which the Creator of all things has established and man has called "love," without which there would vanish from the face of the earth like breath from a window-pane, all those inexplicable beings who look for the rising of the stars and care whether they come or not.

CHAPTER IV

INTO THE THRASHER

THE woods along the river would have given a Persian weaver patterns and colors which would have driven him to despair. You of the East, where such things are spread before your eyes every autumn, must fail, a little, to understand the wonder of it to Fremont, who had seen it so rarely, with those prairie-bred eyes of his, and his heredity derived from generations of forest dwellers. The gold of the hickories, the bright yellow of the poplars, the purple of the oaks interspersed with deep green, and here and there the great red globes of the maples burning like torches! He stopped Maggie and Nibsie and looked at it with moist eyes. Winifred snuggled up to him with something like a twinge of jealousy that anything but herself could so move him.

Uncle Steve had given them his old pair of horses as a special favor. He was now much more important in Lithopolis than in the days when he hauled freight or drove the stage. Mr. Roswell Upright had moved to "the Centre" as they still called the county-seat; which was also become the center of the contracting and political interests of the county, and Raws was much more interested in politics and contracting than in the livery business. Uncle Steve had taken over the stable and settled down, much to the satisfaction and pride of Aunt Zuby.

"You'll want to drive around a little in this made-to-order weather," said he, "an' the best top buggy in the stable is yourn. An' you can have Maggie an' Nibsie, too. It takes a horse genius to understand them mares, an' nobody but me drives 'em. But I ca'c'late you wun't want to hurry from hither to yon, much. Take 'em an' drive 'em as you'd be drove."

"We'll go up the river," said Fremont, "and maybe see Bent Bushyager. I want to thank him for what he did for me—for us, Winnie."

Fremont thought how much prettier it would have been if the people had laid out the road along the river bank among the trees and by the water-side, instead of out on the prairie on the section line.

"And then," said Winnie, "we would have been out of sight when you acted up so!"

The high visibility of the prairie road had its drawbacks; but it did not prevent Fremont's looking down the hollow leading to the ravine where the man had hidden with the horses that day when he and Bent had last gone fishing. He thought he detected a slight trail leading from the road down there into the wooded glen from the highway. There was a sinister something in the air even in Lithopolis, and as one approached the neighborhood of the Bushyager tribe it grew. A young girl in the yard at the farm of Bowie Bushyager scurried back toward the barn as they drove in, and then all was quiet. At last Bowie himself came from an unexpected quarter, and stood behind a row of trees until he had looked the visitors over; when he came out and greeted them heartily.

"Bent," said he, when Fremont had inquired after his old prairie companion. "He ain't hyur. I reckon he's gone down to Owsley's. You know whur it's at?"

"We'll drive back that way," replied Fremont, as he induced the old mares to move.

"Better stay and eat with us," said Bowie. "We hain't got much, but what there is yo're welcome to!"

The unseasonable time of day was their excuse for declining. Fremont was glad of the chance which would take them to that old fishing ground and bend of the river which still was called Crescent City, with no thought on the part of any one of the absurdity of the name. And this road wound down a hollow among the trees, as Winifred said all their roads should do.

The old house which had once been the miller's dwelling looked more ruinous than ever. Fremont saw, however, that Owsley, whom he was surprised to find still living there, had repaired the old foundation walls, as if in an effort to make the half-under-ground lower story into something like a stronghold, or a warm place for the storage of vegetables. He saw, however, no garden and no cultivated fields. The place had lapsed into forest again.

Here, also, one looking casually into the open glade would surely have thought the place quite uninhabited. Fremont tied his horses to a sapling, and he and Winifred walked together to the door, on which they tapped. There was a rustling, and then silence. Fremont tapped again, and after a short time, the door slowly opened and Mark Owsley, looking exactly as he had when Fremont had seen him last, and just as he did when he was a Sunday-school superintendent in Lithopolis, peeped out, and then threw the door wide open and greeted him heartily.

"Glad to see you, Freem!" he exclaimed.

"This is my wife," said Fremont, glad to have the opportunity of practising on the word.

"Didn't know you were married," said Owsley. "Come in! Come in!"

"Is Bent anywhere about?" asked Fremont. "His father told us we'd probably find him here."

"Did he?" queried Owsley. "I'll tell him you're here. Back in a minute. Walk in, and have chairs."

He was gone only a moment, but it was some time before Bently arrived. During this time, Mr. Owsley became quite talkative, especially with Winifred. He had a desk in one corner and on it several old books. His talk took a religious turn. He had been a praying man in his youth he told Winifred, and there was no text in the Scriptures which he thought of oftener than "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." He often shed tears when he thought how he had backslidden, but while the lamp holds out to burn, he continued, the vilest sinner may return. And yet, he was convinced from his later reading that the churches, which nobody thought more of than he did, were not in possession of the whole truth. He was occupying his time, he said, in a study of Daniel and the Revelation and was certain that people, even as he spoke, were living in the last days. The "Second Coming," he was certain, would be soon, and he had been studying some things in those books when they tapped on the door, to see if under God even so vile an instrument as he might be the one to tell the world just when to look for this event of events. And just as Winifred was about to ask him for the date, Bent Bushyager came in, smiling, and with his hand extended to grasp Fremont's.

"Wal," said he, "we done what you wanted, didn't we?"

"You certainly did," replied Fremont. "I drove down here to thank you for it."

"Sho!" said Bent. "That wasn't nothing. But Uncle Forrest thought you was foolish not to take that office they offered yeh. But we'll give yeh somethin' better one of these days. You wait an' see."

"Fremont McConkey," observed the pious Mr. Owsley, "would make us an excellent sheriff. That's an office for

a young man. And it will belong to our part of the county, when the change comes."

Fremont assured them that he had no ambitions in the line of office holding. What he intended to do was to—then he stopped. Stopped because he had nothing more to say. It suddenly occurred to him that all the plans he had made for the future had come to an end with his marriage to Winifred. So he stopped because he had nothing to say; but even on this curious wedding journey, he now began to feel the thought of it intruding on the care-free mood into which his passion and Winifred's had exalted him.

After he had proudly accompanied his wife to the old-fashioned general store in Lithopolis, and helped her with the purchases which her lack of purse and scrip had made necessary, they agreed that it would be as much a pleasure as a duty to visit "his folks." All their fear of her father had vanished and she had spoken once or twice yearningly of wanting to see Cathie. Uncle Steve and Aunt Zuby urged them to stay longer, but when Aunt Zuby had helped Winifred with her new garments, and Fremont had spoken to Uncle Steve of the problem of transport, it was solved by sending out a two-seated rig with a single passenger; and one evening after a day's drive through the glories of an Iowa Indian summer, Fremont and Winifred alighted with their slight impedimenta at the McConkey door.

"I was lookin' for you!" sobbed Mrs. McConkey, as she took Winifred into her arms. "I'd heard about your actions, you naughty boy!" as she hugged and kissed Fremont. "Why didn't you come to your old mother the first thing?"

"Well," replied Fremont in a voice which trembled a little, "we're here now, and we're going to stay until you're tired of us. We'll make you twice glad, ma!"

"I think I see myself!" said Mrs. McConkey. "But you've come in what I would say was a bad time, if it wasn't

my own children"—here she squeezed Winifred's hand—"we're goin' to have thrashers day after to-morrow!"

"Good!" said Fremont. "That insures me a job. Can I have my old place bucking off straw, pa?"

Alvin McConkey was embarrassed by the presence of his new daughter-in-law from town, but he made it quite clear that while Fremont didn't have to work in the thrashing, and wasn't expected to, he could buck off straw, or cut bands or measure up, or anything he wanted to, as long as he wanted to, and no longer. Alvin came through beautifully on this occasion. He clasped Winifred's hands warmly, and when she kissed him, he returned the salute with an earnestness that seemed to please the little girl immensely, especially when he went on to state that he sort of wondered when he heard of the elopement what had got into Fremont to do such a thing, but now that he'd seen her and got another good look at her after she growed up, he'd be ashamed to own a boy of his that wouldn't have run off with her, by George, if he got the chance! And then she kissed him again.

"They're good," said Winifred to Fremont when they were alone. "Why, they just make me one of you! I'd like to live with them always, Neatherd!"

I doubt however whether she would have made good on this proposal. She may have had the tiniest doubt of it before the thrashing was over. The preparations thrilled through the McConkey home all the next day, but it did not disturb the morning slumbers of the bride and groom, save by certain sounds of industry in kitchen and barnyard. Mrs. Absalom Frost was there to help with the deluge of housework, and looked with keen interest at Winifred when she and Fremont appeared after every one had had breakfast—interest, because of that old problem as to where the Sign was when she had helped Fremont into the world, and which had never been settled, because the clock had stopped

—interest and a little reproach for their not being at the table when breakfast was served to the family.

She saw with an eagle's glance just what kind of a wife Fremont had taken to himself. She seemed to take pains to surprise them. She did so, with Winifred sitting on Fremont's lap in the parlor so repeatedly that Winifred lost interest in Mrs. Frost's observations; and as that lady remained for a whole week, her note-book was full of data which may be termed "Winifrediana."

"I s'pose," said she to Mrs. George Story the next Sunday, "that new married folks must do about so much billin' an' cooin'; but that girl don't seem to care who sees her do it. I'll bet that where he sets down, he's a reg'lar checkerboard, from holdin' her on his lap on them splint-bottomed chairs of Mis' McConkey's!"

"Wal," replied Mrs. Story, "don't find fault with 'em! It don't in general last long!"

You ask why our good old friend, Mrs. Frost, never once thought of blaming Fremont, though he certainly must have taken part in these dreadful improprieties? Why should she? The lady, to an elderly lady's mind, is, in such cases, always the one charged with responsibility.

All rules were suspended in thrashing time. The morning when the McConkeys began thrashing, the house was aroused and alive at three o'clock, electrified by the arrival of the machine, which had run late the evening before at a neighbor's, and was pulled in before dawn. Fremont tore himself from the arms of his bride as the hail of the boss thrasher echoed from the direction of the first setting of wheat, and he rose and donned his plow-boy's clothes. The women were busy getting breakfast. His brother Frank was off on a horse rousing from their dreams the men in the neighborhood who were to help. When he returned, he could hear as he went to breakfast, the blows of the mauls on the stakes which held the great machine in

place against the strain of the ten horses which tugged at the sweeps an hour later. The thrashing gang had had its breakfast, and out in the air clear as crystal, among the stubbles bearded with hoar frost, were waiting for day and the quota of workers.

The thrashing machine, the steel plow, the reaper, the seeder, the whole system of horse-drawn machines, supplemented by the easily-built railway, applied to this great expanse of treeless black soil by the tireless energy of the American pioneers, were the agencies which had already revolutionized the world in a manner which it had not experienced since the invention of the steam engine and the utilization of coal. It was an agricultural revolution, felt over all the world. Cheap food blighted the farmer of the Atlantic slope, and drove him to the factories, which thrived like weeds. The forest returned to the New England farms and the woodbine covered the old stone walls of fields which the ancestors of these Iowa pioneers had cleared with prayers on their lips, and with guns leaning on near-by stumps—for use against the skulking savage. The European landlord found his rent unpaid, and the peasants of the Old World, from the Bay of Biscay to the terraced hillsides of Siam, wondered why times were so hard. The Mississippi Valley was pouring into the markets of the world such a wealth of grains and meats that the strangest of all phenomena was taking place—people were starving because of the plenteousness of food. And this abounding energy of the new regions which were turning things topsy-turvy, had its concentration in thrashing time on Alvin McConkey's farm that autumn morning in 1878.

The great red machine stood between the high, hive-shaped stacks. The ten horses were standing hitched to the five long wooden sweeps of the horse-power. The driver stood on the board platform in the center with his long whip in his hand. The pitchers had climbed the stacks with

their forks, the handles polished by long contact with hard hands, their three tines inserted into the top sheaves of the stack. Frank McConkey, the neighborhood band cutter, who had never cut a feeder's finger, motioned for enough bundles to cover the feeding table, the bands of which he cut carefully so as to have them ready when the machine should start. The separator tender, with oil can in hand, went carefully over the machine, oiling up. The measurer cleaned out the box of his mechanical tally-box, put one half-bushel measure under the grain-spout, and set another where he could sweep it into place as he removed the full measure, which moved the trigger of the tallying mechanism as he took it out. The man who hauled off the grain had his wagon backed up ready for the flood of wheat.

And then, the captain of all this organization, the feeder, stepped up to his place in front of the mouth of the great separator. He might have been taken for a sailor or a plainsman, or the engineer of a steamboat—there was something about him so bluff, so hearty, so full of decision. As I write this, every one is buying himself or herself a bicycle, and we are divided in our fidelity to our favorite types of "bikes." The machine as to which our partisanship divided us into factions then, was the thrashing machine. The feeder of this machine, who was always in debt to the manufacturer, as all thrashermen habitually were, was a partisan of the "Buffalo Pitts" machine. He loved it as the captain loves his vessel. He argued with much profanity with partisans of the "Rumley," the "Chicago Pitts," the "J. I. Case," or the "Vibrator." And now there was pride in his port as he stood before the gaping mouth with his hand on the nearest sheaf, looked down on both sides to see whether every man was in his place, glanced up at the top of the stack at the pitchers, turned to the driver and nodded.

Looking to the east to see the sun just peeping over

the level horizon, the driver spoke to those dependable teams which could be relied upon to start the great machine; he touched a slow horse lightly with the tip of his lash—and with some irregularities, soon smoothed out by the driver's skill, the ten horses put their weights and then the power of their muscles into their big leather collars, and the "Buffalo Pitts" started. The feeder saw the ponderous cylinder before him begin to revolve, trying to gnash its polished steel teeth against those of the concaves, but failing because they always passed each other by a hair's breadth. A deep growl like that of a bulldog magnified fifty diameters, filled the air, and as the cylinder gathered speed it rose from a bass to a baritone, and then to a tenor of a volume which sang over four square miles of haze-obscured prairie. The feeder looked up at the pitchers, saw the man who pitched to the machine, with his next bundle ready to fall on the table, saw Frank with his band-cutter's knife ready to slice softly through the band of it, and then, he moved the first two sheaves gently over between the open lips, deftly twitched their butts upward, and the great operation was on. The tenor took a little lower note; the horses felt the sweeps holding them back; the driver's shouts rose to a higher and more peremptory tone; and if everything went well, they were off upon a half-day's run, during which the feeder's pride would be that he would feed those four great stacks through the thrasher so steadily that not once would the thrashed straw in the straw-carrier fail to pass in an unbroken stream, hiding the slats of the carrier; not once would an inexpert handling of a bundle choke the thrasher down, even to a baritone; to say nothing of a bass note; not once would the cloud of chaff cease to rise from behind the sieves; not once would the stream of wheat fail to flow into the half-bushel measures which would keep the measurer and the man who hauled off in a perspiring hurry. And when, with the last bundle but one of the

fourth stack fed through, the driver with much ado brought the horses to a halt, aided by the feeder with a big headless sheaf jammed with uncut band into the cylinder, the men, with their ears still ringing with the roar of the machinery, wiped their brows and with jokes and shouts, swarmed to the house for their dinners, only to find that by some magic —while they were eating—the thrashers' crew had moved the machine over, staked it down, eaten their own hasty meal and were ready for another setting in the afternoon, to be finished in the darkness, perhaps, so that the great engine might be again moved, to begin on a third setting at sunrise to-morrow.

It was a wonderful thing. It was this frenzy for accomplishment on the part of the mid-west farmers, which broke the back of agriculture of our own East and of the earth—the world has never been the same since. It proves many things; but perhaps the most interesting of them is that there may be such a thing as too much of a good thing. Also, that any good thing has a damaging recoil, when it is not equitably distributed. These Iowa farmers were, in their own persons, and those of their families, suffering from the fact that this recoil of their production was economically shocking to themselves.

Fremont felt that sense of harmony with the universe which one feels who, accustomed to labor, resumes it after a period of leisure. Dimly he saw the poetry of the day's work, the lessons of its neighborly cooperation, the triumph of its mechanism. As he did his task of keeping away the straw which poured in a fluffy stream from the straw-carrier, and would have swamped the whole machine if he had remitted his toil for a few minutes even, he thought of the flail with which his father remembered his grandfather to have thrashed his grain back in Massachusetts; of the cattle driven about over the reaped grain in the Holy Land; and of the thrashing floor where Boaz winnowed

the barley, and where when he had become weary and slept by the pile of corn, Ruth had gone and lain down at his feet—and then he thought of Winifred and wondered how she was passing the long, long forenoon, during which she would not have seen him from dawn to noontime!

He did not make that frenzied rush for the dinner-table which hunger-impelled thrashing hands are expected to execute, though heaven knew he was hungry enough. He wanted to ask where Winifred was, of Sarah and Mrs. Frost who, when he arrived at the kitchen were eagerly serving the first arrivals with that superabundance of food which an Iowa housewife delights to lay before her guests —and thrashers are always in the best sense of the word, guests—but he knew such gangs were fertile in jokes, which, like other forms of fertility, were not sure to be over-immaculate in character. How they loved to see blushes! So he looked from room to room for the dear girl and finally found her, prostrate on her bed, weeping.

"Why, Winnie," he exclaimed, flying to her, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing," she replied, burying her face on his breast.

"Has any one been cross to you, darling?"

"No," she sobbed from the depths of his chaffy wammus, "who would be cross to me? They're awful good to me."

"Then why are you crying? There must be something wrong! Tell me, dear!"

"There's always something wrong," said Winnie, kissing him over and over again, "when you're not with me. It's the first time you've been away from me, and it seemed as if I c-c-couldn't stand it. I must have you with me, Fremont, all the time—every minute of the time. If I had Cathie with me it might help a little; but without her, and with you away from me, I j-j-just can't stand it. Don't go out again this afternoon, Fremont. Don't!"

"Dearest!" said Fremont, "I wouldn't, but what can I say?"

"Tell 'em you're sick," suggested Winifred. "I've just got to have my big boy with me!"

"I know what they'll all say," said Fremont. "They'd say I was love-sick, or worse. Darling, I've got to go. They'd be short-handed if I didn't."

"Tell 'em I'm sick," said Winnie. "I won't let you go back."

"They'd say all around the machine and the neighborhood the same things about you," said Fremont. "And you know, dear, I've got to begin work sometime!"

Yes, Winnie saw this, but it seemed so soon; and it was so long from morning to noon out here where they got up in the middle of the night; and when they had been married a little longer, maybe she could endure it; but now just think of all the years when she hadn't had him at all, and how hungry she was for him! And wasn't he nearly starved, too? They began laughing at their various sorts of hunger, and pretty soon, Fremont and Winnie went out to the table, where the gang running with the machine was taking its delayed meal. Fremont was grateful to them for making their jokes quite tolerable, knowing as he did how many intolerable jests they had in their repertory. He really did not blame them for causing that rosy blush to overspread Winnie's pretty face—and he went out with them, leaving her looking mournfully after him.

What a silly little girl! But I can look back to that sort of time with the condemnation which, of course, I share with you, my dear Dorothy, and find so many excuses for them that I fear I should make myself ridiculous if I were to express them. In general, as Mrs. George Story so well said, it doesn't last so very long. Perhaps it's just as well. For thrashing and things really have to be done, since "men must work and women must weep."

In these days none of the farmers know, save through memory, what was the task Fremont discharged that thrashing time—the work of "bucking off straw." We thought then that the fertility of our soil was inexhaustible, and that manure tended to spoil the rich land of the prairies; we had little live stock, and wheat straw was not regarded as of much value, save by some queer men like Jacob Vandemark, who made himself well-to-do out of the neighbors' thrown-away straw. So the usual manner of handling it was to get it away from the tail of the thrashing machine in the cheapest way, and when the thrashing was done, to set fire to it.

There was always a chance to exchange quips with the man who tended the separator, or to crack a joke with the measurer, or the ones who hauled off grain, and Fremont took full advantage of these social opportunities; nevertheless he thought a little sadly of poor Winifred, who, he was afraid, was back again on the bed, crying because it was so long since she had seen him. He wondered if all brides were like this. He felt sure they were not all so doting. He was very proud to know that he had bound Winifred to him by these hoops of steel so far beyond his deserts—proud, and a little embarrassed. He wondered if people would understand. And within an hour he saw as he approached the growing pile of straw, after dumping one of his burdens, a broad smile on the face of the separator-tender, and on the faces of those who were measuring and hauling off—why, every one on the job—driver, feeder and all, were laughing at him! And then suddenly he knew why. As the pole took hold of the straw, and he put his feet on it with a shout to his horse, who should run out from the dust of the sieves and leap to a place on the pole beside him, but Winifred—Winifred, with a blush on her cheek and a little tear in her eye! And they were all laughing at them.

I fully understand why he was for a moment a little ashamed of Winifred for this frank confession of her feelings; but I am just a little ashamed of him for it. And I am proud to be able to record the fact that he gave her no hint of his feelings, but rather made a game of this bucking off straw with her.

He taught her how to drive the horse. He played tricks on her, by pushing her in front of the pole, covering her up with the soft straw, and letting her dig herself out and come up all bewildered and not knowing which way he was from her. And when the time came, after the last sheaf of the second setting had been thrashed, and the roaring cylinder came to a stop under the compulsion of that last sheaf with uncut band, and they all ran in to supper, I am glad to set it down that Fremont enjoyed hugely the fact that Winifred was uproariously forced to sit at the head of the table, praised as the best hand on the job, and promoted to her rightful place as one of the boys. He flushed to recognize the fact that these tanned, dusty, bearded fellows with grime in their beards, were acting as gentlemen should. By the time the last setting of the McConkey farm had been thrashed, Winifred was quite as able to buck off straw as was Fremont, and knew every man on the job by his first name—and she had not lain on her bed and stained Kate McConkey's best patch-work quilt any more with her tears. Of course, she was silly, Mrs. Frost said, but she wan't a bad girl for all that, even if she was bound to lead Fremont a great life with her sickishness over him.

And Mrs. Frost was still more convinced of this "sickishness" when, one afternoon, while Winifred was going out to take Fremont a lunch as he plowed in the stubble-field, she dropped the lunch, and running to a girl who had alighted from a buggy in the front yard, clasped her

in her arms, and burst into tears of joy, as she said sobbingly:

"Cathie! Oh, Cathie! I've cried to see you! Oh, I thought you'd never come. And where's papa, Cathie? Surely, he wouldn't let you come to see me alone!"

CHAPTER V

INTO ANOTHER MACHINE

"DEAR CATHIE," so ran a letter to Catherine Ashe which Winifred found means to send, "I don't believe I can get my 'Neatherd' to take me home to you and May and papa, just on the strength of what you said. I told him that papa had sent word that he was willing for us to come home. Fremont says that this doesn't sound like a very urgent invitation. He doesn't know father as we do, you know, and can't see that when a father in a novel bursts into tears and blesses his wayward daughter and her lover, it doesn't mean half as much as this does from our stubborn dad—and I wonder if my big boy hasn't a streak of stubbornness in him, too? Mrs. Absalom Frost was here while we were thrashing, and she told a lot of mean things that papa said when we ran away. He ought to be ashamed of himself! Why, he didn't want me to die, did he? But I'm afraid that Fremont heard these things. I almost know he did, for the thrashers said—there were lots of them—and I worked at bucking off straw. They were awful nice to me, even if they were pretty dirty (but they couldn't help that. You ought to have seen my clothes! I'm so glad you brought me some, Cathie)—they said that Captain Ashe wouldn't make any votes by being so uppish with the boy who gave him the nomination; and they'd about as soon vote for a Democrat as a man that went back on a fellow that had been so useful

to him, just because he'd done what any man would be tickled to death to do (such nonsense!). I'll try to get Fremont to take me home, but I really think he's prouder than we suspected. Kiss May for me a dozen times and don't let her go with that little Smythe boy. I never would marry a man as short as he is!"

Election was approaching. It looked as if the next change in the weather would freeze the ground. This made it a time of emergency for every one on the McConkey farm, where there was much stubble still unplowed, as well as for Captain Ashe, whose political fences were down in places, as suggested by Winifred's letter. The captain knew more about this disaffection among Fremont's friends, whom Fremont was surprised to find he possessed, than Winifred suspected. The Democrat was riding the county telling what an ingrate Ashe was, to take the fruits of Fremont's labors in the political vineyard, then throw him into contact with that pretty girl of his and try to cheat him out of the girl. All the talk about their being too poor to marry was nonsense. Boys and girls married on nothing every day in Iowa; and while the middle Ashe girl would never be a real help to a man as the oldest one would, who ever heard of any one starving or begging in Iowa? A fellow could lose his farm, even, and start over again; or a fellow like Fremont could get office; and Ashe's girl was no better than yours or mine John. You'd better vote for a man that remembers his friends, as I do.

This sort of electioneering was proving effective, and Raws Upright and Doctor Bliven told Captain Ashe plainly that he ought to fix this thing up. You couldn't tell what it might develop into. The friends of Henderson L. Burns weren't any too enthusiastic, either, for the man who was slapping Fremont McConkey in the face, after the boy had given H. L. his nomination, like a darned fool. And, Mr. Upright insisted, not only ought the fences to be

mended, so that they wouldn't have a Copperhead in the court-house, but young McConkey ought to be taken care of somehow in the clerk's office, no matter how many promises Captain Ashe might have made, so he wouldn't be bulling around in that wild-eyed way of his in the next campaign. He ought to be tied up in the machine said Raws. Even now there was talk over around the Bushyager neighborhood, of running him for sheriff. No matter how many promises of places in the clerk's office had been made, the captain ought to break 'em and take care of young McConkey, for the sake of the girl and the machine.

"I've made no promises," said Captain Ashe.

"No," said Mr. Upright, "o' course not. Jest give a few fellers to understand that they'd be necessary in the office, hey?"

"Well, maybe," admitted the captain.

"It's a mean candidate that wun't promise a fellow an office if he's elected. We'll have to salve the sore spots after they break out. See?"

"I begin to see what the Bushyagers are after," said Doctor Bliven. "If this horse-stealin' and haulin' off hogs from farmers' barnyards keeps on increasing, they may need a sheriff of their choosing."

"How Freem got 'em I don't know," observed Raws. "But I can't hold 'em against him. An' if this grand larceny business ever comes to sugarin' off, you can tell Freem for me that the less he's got to do with the sheriff's office, the better it'll be f'r him. Lynch law will go into operation, an' the sheriff will be suspended from actin'. I ain't sayin' nothin' about the Bushyagers, y' know. 'S fur's I know they're honest sons o' toil—or was till they went back on me—f'r you, Cap!"

"Well," said the captain, "I'll think of it. I hate like the devil——"

"Think quick," said Raws. "Time flies!"

Something was happening to Fremont, which may or may not seem remarkable, according to the reader's family experiences. Fremont was at last getting really acquainted with his father. In a person with a quality of dourness in his temperament, as the "Mc" in Alvin McConkey's name might connote in his, a lifetime of economic struggle, with such personalities as Jason Holbrook in the background, there is a good deal to build up aloofness in relations, with one so dreamy, poetic and elusive as Fremont had been. Now that Fremont was going away Alvin thawed toward him. They even discussed the young man's future. Fremont confided to his father his perplexities; and now that the old issue of his going to college was tacitly accepted as dead, the absorbing subject of how the boy was to make a living for himself and his young wife was so narrow that nothing divided the father from the son. Alvin offered him the chance of living with the McConkey family and taking a partnership in the farming operations. There was work enough for himself and Frank and Fremont. Teaching school would not bring in enough for two; but Fremont might teach winters.

"I think that's generous of you," remarked Fremont; "but Winnie and I are married, and I don't like the idea of our not having a home to ourselves."

"Your mother thought you'd feel that way," said Alvin. "She thinks that's the right way for you to feel. I guess it is, too. Well, if you can find a farm to rent, we'll be able to let you have some horses on terms that you can meet; an' I guess there's machinery enough here that'll do you, except f'r the reaper and mower."

"I'll look around and talk with Winnie," remarked Fremont. "I'm afraid she'll find it lonesome, though."

There was a long silence. Each of the two men was

thinking of Winifred's weeping at her young husband's absences; and Alvin was wondering what she would do with the cooking, the washing, the scrubbing, and the children which might come. Fremont was casting about in his mind for some way out of this lonely life of the farm. It was the end of so many, many dreams. He might have quoted to himself that line about "The fell clutch of circumstance" if it had been written, as perhaps it had (let's not bother to look it up), and if he had known it, as maybe he did. Then he seemed to change the subject, while really continuing it.

"Did Cathie bring my papers when she came?" he asked of his mother, who had come in.

"No," she replied. "She just brought clothes for you and Winnie. She said you could gether up the papers when you come."

He would go over those manuscripts and send them to the editors, when he got them. They were written on both sides of the paper and some of them were rolled. That was wrong, he had found out. He guessed he would send one of them to the *New York Ledger;* the one about the Indians capturing the little girl and bringing her up; and the one about the shipwrecked prince, to *Harper's.* If he could only—but just then Winnie and Sarah came in. And that night the ground froze so that plowing was at an end, and corn-husking began. By noon his hands were bleeding and his back was lame; but that is a condition common to all corn-huskers. Sore hands heal during the night, to some extent at least, and lame backs grow better through slumber; and in spite of Winnie's protests that this was dreadful work, and she couldn't allow him to hurt his poor hands, Fremont went out with his team and wagon in the morning, leaving Winnie almost in tears, and quite in bed, telling her with a laugh that it was time for her to learn how the world is fed, and that the hands of his

father and Frank, and almost every farmer in Monterey County were quite as scratched up and worn through as his, and their backs just as lame.

The sun was not up. The northwest wind, which had ended the Indian summer and brought the freeze, had died, and the east was glorious with the forerunners of the day—all crimson and golden and purple. His horses danced in the nipping air. He could hear in other fields other wagons driven across the frozen ridges of the corn-fields in successive spasms of rattle-te-banging, and from a mile off, so still was the morning, he heard the dull, "clump, clump, clump" of the ears of corn against the throw-board, and the men talking to their prancing horses, left without any management save the voice. He began the mechanical operation of husking, the exercise of that knack which took the prairie farmers a quarter of a century to learn after they emerged from the forests into the region where corn became the great crop. The left hand is extended for the ear, which it grasps with the thumb toward the tip; at one sweep of the husking peg on the right hand, the shucks are ripped and with the ripping, the left hand slips them off, and another gesture of the right tears the ear from the stalk and throws it into the wagon-box by hurling it against the high throw-board on the opposite side. Never look at the wagon, there is no time for that; never look at the horses—one can tell what they are doing by the movement of the wagon, and the sound made by their hoofs; never stop to pick off the silks or the little clinging husks; they can go in with the ears. And forget the sky, the clouds, the blood drawn by rosebrier or the sharp tips of the kernels of the "hackberry" ears; forget everything but the economy of movement, the making of every second count. Make sure that you do not fail to tear the ear from the stalk and throw it into the wagon by a single movement of the muscles; see to it that when the right

hand returns from the throw, the body has moved forward if necessary to another proper position, and that the left hand has seized another ear and holds it ready for the husking-peg; and do not fail to remember that if you husk your hundred bushels in a day, the steady "clump, clump, clump" against the throw-board must continue hour after hour, even while the trained horses are making the turn at the end of the field.

Such corn-husking is really quite a respectable accomplishment in the coordination of hand, eye and brain—but of course, not so creditable as dancing or tennis. Its apology is that it feeds the world.

Winnie came out, wrapped up and rosy, only to be kissed and then let severely alone. There was something forbidding in the seeming oblivion into which she found herself plunged. It was the first time she had ever seen any one engaged in labor which rendered him blind, deaf and dumb. At first she was a little hurt and offended; but she emerged from this mood, and busied herself in finding ears which had been missed, calling Fremont's attention to them with a reproving shake of the head, to be answered by a brief smile. And then she was horrified at finding blood on the husks where Fremont had been. By this time, however, the load was husked and they went, with a sound changed from the spasmodic rattle-te-bang of the empty wagon to the pulsating roar of the full one as it dipped like a schooner in a gale over the frozen furrows.

"Why," said Winnie, as they drove up to the crib, "I believe Cathie's here!"

"I believe she is!" said Fremont, as he thrust his shovel down the starting-board into the load, and threw the first shovelful into the crib. "That's the team she drove, hitched to the post. Run and see, dear!"

His father came and took the team from him when he had unloaded.

"You're wanted in the house," he stated in a tone which was overcharged with mystery.

"Now, Fremont," said Cathie as he came in, "I want you to be good."

"I never promised anything so revolutionary in my life," said Fremont. "How do you want me to be good?"

"Well," said Cathie, "I'm going to take Winnie home with me."

"She won't go!" said Fremont.

"Yes, I will! Yes, I will!" shouted Winnie. "Wait till you hear!"

"And then," said Cathie, "father will drive along in a little while, and bring you home with him. You must fetch your satchel, and anything you may need, for he's going to keep you a long time!"

"You're robbing us," exclaimed Mrs. McConkey, with a little catch in her voice—"of our best husker!"

Winnie threw her arms about his neck.

"Don't be stubborn, Neatherd," she pleaded. "Papa wants you to come, and he needs you—and, darling, I want to go home!"

He had to promise or Winifred wouldn't go; and yet, he felt that he would have liked to see the captain face to face and talk with him before pledging himself. Finally, Mrs. McConkey settled the matter.

"Why don't you have some sense, Fremont?" asked she with some asperity. "What do you look for, anyway? Do you want Winifred's father to lay down on the ground before you and knock his head on it—what they call 'the three prostrations and the nine knockings'—to git you to forgive him because you run off with his little, tender slip of a girl? Who's be'n anointin' you king, anyhow? I gosh, if any male animal would do that with Sarah, no matter who he might be, I'd skelp him, instead of tryin' to make up with him, and have him holdin' off like an off-

ox! Try to see Captain Ashe's point of view and have some sense!"

It needs scarcely be stated that Winifred went with Cathie and that Fremont awaited the coming of his father-in-law. He did so with some trepidation. He wondered how people outside of the McConkey family handled such situations, assuming that they had frequent practise in them. He pondered on what he should say to Captain Ashe, and feared it would be very hard to say anything. He rather wanted to run away, when the captain drove up, hitched his team to the post down by the road, and came up to the door swinging his hands to warm his fingers. There was something timid about his knock. If Fremont had only known, his visitor was as much embarrassed as he was. Mrs. McConkey admitted him.

"Why, how d'y' do, Captain Ashe," she said, giving him her hand with a heartiness which cheered him. "Come right in an' warm yourself—in here by the kitchen stove. I'm bakin', an' that always calls for a good fire. Did you meet Cathie and Winnie?"

She knew he had not, but it was a diplomatic way of telling him that Fremont was going home with him.

"Where's Fremont?" he asked.

"Here he comes now," replied Mrs. McConkey, slipping out of the room.

Captain Ashe turned to Fremont, and extended his hand. Fremont took it with a disarming frankness of expression.

"Hello, son!"

"How d'ye do, father!"

"Some chilly outside," remarked the captain.

"It is if you're not exercising," said Fremont.

"Look like an honest farmer," said the captain, with a glance at Fremont's farm clothes.

"Been husking corn," said Fremont. "Pretty frosty before the sun got up."

"Hands sore?" asked the captain. "I see you've got 'em wrapped up."

"Can't husk corn without getting sore hands," said Fremont. "Winnie put those cloths on my fingers. She thought they'd about kill me. Not used to bleeding hands, you know."

"Well, take care of 'em," said the captain. "Might get information in 'em, and make bad sores."

There was nothing melodramatic in this. Nothing dramatic unless one knows the impassiveness of the American pioneers and their children. But it served. It put very complete "information" in Fremont's hands. It swept all the past differences away, quite as effectively as the tears, embraces and kisses which, we are told, would have been essential to such an éclaircissement in Europe—save in that Island whence comes our outer crust and inward fires. It did not, however, quite satisfy Fremont, after that speech of his mother's.

"I hope, father," said he, "that you'll overlook what I have done; and I hope to make it up to you by making Winnie happy all her life."

"Of course," said the captain in a rather unsteady voice, "all that's in the past. Right thing, I suppose we'll say ten years from now. Hindsight better than foresight, always. Comin' with me, hain't you?"

"I hate to leave pa in this busy time," said Fremont, "but——"

"I need you," said the captain. "Election is comin' on, an' it's a busy time for your new father, too. Git your clothes changed, if you want to change 'em, and pack your things and we'll be goin'. I want to get to Foster Blake's in time for dinner, and call on Jake Vandemark an' some others on the way home this afternoon. They hain't been talkin' right on me for clerk the last few days. You can fix 'em all right, especially if we go together. An' then I

want you in a day or so to go to Lithopolis an' stay there till election, an' kind o' line things up. How'd you like to do that? Here's a list of names of fellers I want you to see."

"I'm willing, if I can do any good," remarked Fremont.

He took the list and looked at it. It included nearly all the voters in Willow, Vandemark and Crescent Townships, and some elsewhere. The names of the Bushyagers stood our prominently.

"Who's this man Virgil Jackson in Crescent?" he asked. "I don't know him."

"A feller that married Sally Bushyager," replied the captain. "He seems to be different from the Bushyager crowd. Got money, an' loans it on chattel mortgage. Odd-lookin' genius an' acts like more or less of a fool, but certainly seems to make money. Operates over in the other county, mostly, but he's bought the old Crescent City town site that he seems to 've got tax title to. I count him in with the Bushyagers for votin' purposes. See him, anyhow. Well—ready?"

Captain Ashe was following Raws Upright's recommendation in the conduct of his campaign, so far as Frement was concerned, and, it is only fair to say, the dictates of his heart as to Winifred and Winifred's bridegroom. He grew happier as they went on their way, and found how the Blakes and their neighbors, as well as J. T. Vandemark and his followers, warmed up on receiving a call from Captain Ashe and Fremont McConkey, evincing every symptom of a complete reconciliation. To a few of these voters, those closest to Fremont, the captain whispered the secret that Fremont would be taken care of.

They drew near home with the captain in fine fettle.

"You may as well know," he said, "what I meant by what I told Uncle Jake an' the rest about takin' care of

you, but you mustn't tell it to anybody but your nearest friends that can keep mum. I've be'n thinkin' of your future, sence you threw away the county superintendency—an' that was a noble thing to do, as Cathie is always tellin' me—an' Raws Upright an' I've got it fixed up so I'll be allowed a deputy clerk by the supervisors. I think I can git you pretty big pay—as much as nine hundred dollars a year, by George! What you think?"

Now Fremont felt about as a man who, when he had been cast ashore on a desert island with his dependent bride, and was scanning the horizon for a ship, was suddenly invited to step up the street and take the presidency of the First National Bank. He might not have planned to be a banker; he might not know whether he had the ability to be; but he would leave that to the board of directors. He would take the position. Why, nine hundred a year was a wonderful lot of money then! It would buy a hundred acres of land. It would build a better house than most people lived in in Monterey. It would enable him to keep a girl for Winnie, and to send out the washing, if there were such a thing as a washerwoman in the county.

"Do you think you can do it?" he asked.

"As sure as shootin', with Raws for it," said the captain. "An' a deputy is needed, too. The way the business of the court is pickin' up, with all these new wholesale houses comin' in, an' mortgage foreclosures, an' right-of-way litigation, an' suits to quiet title, and mechanic's liens, before I get through with my first term, we'll probably need two deputies. It'll be something like six weeks after election before we go into office, an' I want you to go into the place an' learn the ropes from the old clerk. He says he can git a little allowance for you. No, Fremont, this will settle your career. You'll be one of the important men

in Monterey, if you keep your eye peeled f'r the main chance. Anyhow, it fixes it for four or six years. How d'ye like it, Fremont?"

They had driven up to the Ashe barn through the alley, and both of them had seen Winifred looking out of the window and waving her hand at them. At Fremont's suggestion, the captain went into the back door to see Winnie, while Fremont put out the horses. Then he sat down a moment on the manger and thought. Had he quite lost control of his own affairs? How happy he ought to be! And how perverse he was to feel this shrinking against the new and great position, when one considered what an obscure country teacher and farmer he had been only six weeks ago. He shrank, not only from the new position, but from the way in which it came to him, and from the work he was to do to further the plans. He went in, and found Winifred with her arms about her father's neck, her face on his breast, and seated on his lap with his arms about her. As Fremont came in, she looked up at him from under her hair, with such a look of divine love and content, that he knelt down within her out-curved arm, and added his embrace to that of her father.

"I want to thank you," said he, answering after this long time, the question the captain had put to him as they drove into the village, "for what you were telling me back along the road. I'll like working with you like that."

So they made another visit to Uncle Steve Lawless and Aunt Zuby, this time with a bride appareled in all the simple finery which she possessed, and a groom carrying a bundle of manuscripts which ought never to have been written on both sides of the paper, nor rolled. But when an author has to hide his productions away in a grain sack in the granary to keep himself from the humiliation of being found out and laughed at, or not laughed at, which would have been equally embarrassing, he can not be fas-

tidious as to the matter of laying the sheets, folding them, or rolling them.

It was a new experience to show these papers to any one, as he did to Winifred in their room at Uncle Steve's while Fremont was lazily visiting his list of voters, who said things to him which gave him a world of pride, that of possessing a new sort of influence in the community—an influence in the politics of the county. He was more puffed up by it in secret than he would have been willing to admit. He and Winifred had long hours together which began with a stern intention to revise and copy the stories, and usually ended in the soft dalliance of the honeymoon. If the dear girl did not seem to be able to help him in his literary work, as she called it, as much as he had anticipated, he took the blame himself. He should practise more and sterner self-denial. In her waking hours he did not read nor talk of anything but matters so elusive and so esoteric that they can be no more than hinted at here to such of the illuminati as may read this; he was reading a new book which opened to him its virgin pages and demanded construction and interpretation. So he found himself waiting until she slept, and then taking up the work of creating literature from the pages he had audaciously attempted before he had taken his great Degree. I am sorry that the degraded editors missed in it the divine afflatus.

Election day came, and Monterey County vindicated itself again from the charge that it could possibly place its affairs in the hands of the Copperheads. It left the courthouse in the hands of that great party which had saved the nation and to which, not only the nation, but its contracts and perquisites belonged, including the office of Clerk of the Circuit and District Courts, which it confided to that sterling patriot Captain Fillmore Ashe, formerly of the 98th Pennsylvania Infantry; and the deputy clerkship also, an

office the creation of which, as strongly urged upon the Board of Supervisors by Mr. Roswell Upright, increasing business made imperatively necessary. And as to the latter office, a quotation from the *Monterey Journal,* which its editor, Dick McGill, had just turned into a semi-weekly, will enlighten the historian. The item goes:

"Fremont the Pathfinder, by which name we refer to John Charles Fremont McConkey, has found his Pacific Coast and Land of Gold in the clerk's office as deputy, according to an announcement by the clerk-elect, Honorable Fillmore Ashe. Mr. McConkey will no longer be the 'Neatherd,' except as term of endearment, and when out after votes in the cattle country. Our 'Pathfinder' found his way to his new 'Gold Coast' via the Willow, Vandemark and Crescent Township caucuses and the County Convention, where he shot like a meteor athwart the evening sky, in one of the most brilliant first engagements in politics which ye scribe hath ever been witness to. But Freemie wasn't through at the end of the convention. He came to the Teachers' Institute, he saw, he was conquered—by the charms of the fair daughter of the valiant captain. Of the elopement which followed, mention has previously been made in these veracious columns. We now are pleased to state—though our delight is not shared by some patriots who are said to have expected the job—that Mr. Fremont McConkey will be deputy clerk of the courts under Captain Ashe. The happy couple will temporarily make their home with the family of the bride.

"We congratulate the new deputy, the clerk, the county and all concerned. If all elopements turned out so happily, they would deserve to become universal. Mr. McConkey will assume control of the volumes of records of the courts, with all their accumulations of dust, in which he will spend such of his time as he is not permitted to spend with the blushing bride and the Ashe family, as a reward for his audacity in running off with our local belle. Repentance? If this be repentance in 'Dust and Ashes,' why, please pass the 'Dust' and especially the 'Ashes.' "

BOOK FIVE

CHAPTER I

LIFE AT THE SAINT TROPLAS

THE name of the hostelry in which Fremont and Winifred took up their abode in Monterey puzzled him. Aside from Paul Holbrook and Mrs. Hamilton Smythe, whose husband was the junior member of the banking firm of Holbrook & Smythe, I suppose he was the only person in Monterey who would have given that name a second thought. There must be something of the philologist in any one who is so completely given over to the world of language as was Fremont; and words were spiritual beings to him. The name of the hotel puzzled him, even as the way of life there perplexed and fretted Winifred.

The old tavern is gone now. When the Chicago & Northwestern Railway won its fight for the crossing of Sherman Street, and began laying side-tracks of its terminals where the old village of Monterey Centre stood, the buildings between Sherman and Magnolia Streets were torn down for more than a quarter of a mile, and their places

taken by tracks, wholesale houses, freight houses, coal yards and the like. One does not need to be a very old resident to remember this; but few will recall the old name of the old hotel building fronting northwest on the corner of Magnolia and Spruce Streets, which became in turn a cheap boarding-house, a wholesale and retail liquor house, and finally a junk shop. But when in January, 1879, Fremont began drawing that munificent salary of nine hundred dollars a year—which was quite seventy-five dollars a month—this old building was just mellowing down into hale middle age, with a good head of hair in the way of shingles, only slightly grayed by the weather, and its frame a little stooped along the middle of the roof only. The puzzling name was painted by a God-fearing sign painter in beautiful white letters on a ground of black, as follows: "ST. TROPLAS HOTEL."

The philologist germ in Fremont's mind struggled with that word "St. Troplas." He had never heard of such a saint, and he thought he had read of all likely to have been heard of by Matt Trickey, son of old William Trickey, who married one of Amos Bemisdarfer's daughters, and moved into town to keep hotel. One day as Fremont read a copy of the *Dubuque Herald* the name of a hotel mentioned in a news item from some Mississippi River town attracted his attention, and that smile, first as of recognition of something lost, then of that triumph which ejaculates "That's it!" spread over his face.

"Who painted your sign?" he asked of his landlord as he passed out on his way to his office.

"Narse Lackwire," replied Matt, referring, it must be explained, to that old French citizen and house painter as well as farmer, Narcisse Lacroix. "Hain't she a daisy?"

"Who told him how to spell it?" asked Fremont.

"Well," said Matt, "as to spellin', Freem, you know that all the spellin' schools I've ever spelt down, you could hold

in a pint-cup. I thought it was a nice name, an' told him what it was, an' he spelt her hisself. Ain't it all right?"

"How did you pronounce it?" asked Fremont.

"Centropolis," answered Matt. "Jest like that, 'Centropolis Hotel.' Nobody ever said they was anything wrong with it. What yeh mean by this cross-examination?"

"It's all right," replied Fremont reassuringly. "No better painted sign in Monterey."

He went to his office smiling. He could visualize the scene, when Matthias Trickey and Narcisse Lacroix had worked out the conditions under which the great sign had been painted—the little, straggling, treeless village of Monterey Centre, now, in summer embowered in verdure; the board sidewalks, each built according to the taste and fancy of the proprietor in the absence of any ordinance, wide, narrow, high or low, with wide gaps here and there across which the pedestrian made his way over earth paths in dry and through puddles of mud in wet weather; the marvelous grassy savannah coming quite up to the village limits, broken beyond here and there by raw and unbeautiful farmsteads, each electric with human hope; and there stood Matthias, carefully pronouncing the name some commercial traveler had mentioned to him, of his favorite hotel in St. Louis, Davenport, Burlington or Dubuque—"Centropolis!"

Then the devout Narcisse had scratched his head, repeated the word in his French manner, and added: "St. Troplas" to the calendar of saints! One heard in it his voyageur's accent. The incident typifies the muddling through of the new American communities. We were guessing, not only at names, but at institutions. We were pronouncing our government with a mingling of the accents of all the regions beyond and in the woodlands, of those of the islands from which we brought its germs, and with a mixture of the argots, dialects and languages of the nations. Especially in our county government, regarding which Fre-

mont was now seeking light, and perhaps finding darkness. Here and now, I nominate St. Troplas for the position of patron saint of Monterey County.

The St. Troplas was not the best hotel in the town; but not even the liberal salary of nine hundred dollars a year would permit of the residence of our young people in the Hotel Monterey, new, and built of brick from the new brickyards which were eventually to give employment to thousands, and to furnish the tile for the drainage of the wet counties in the interior of the state. The St. Troplas had its faithful clientele, however, which it held in spite of the inefficiency of Mr. Trickey, for he had forethoughtedly married a daughter of that good Pennsylvania Dutchman—as we called the Germans from that state—who had the genius for cookery possessed, I believe, by all the Dunkard women. I know little of their church government, but I am prepared to believe that it requires every woman communicant to pass an examination giving her something like one hundred and fifty per cent. in all branches of cookery. And Mrs. Trickey presided over the kitchen of the St. Troplas.

By this time Winifred and Fremont were getting back their appetites. The St. Troplas was an abode of sybaritic luxury to the clodhopper from Willow Township. The farmers usually bought crackers and cheese in the grocery stores when they took a meal in the town; but the more extravagant went occasionally to eat one of Susan Trickey's dinners, even though it did cost twenty-five cents. It was some comfort to know in such cases that the traveling man seated at the same table paid thirty-five cents for the same meal, of which in nine cases in ten the farmer ate twice as much as he did. But let us not condemn this injustice. It is not often that the farmers get the best of it financially. And where the farmers felt at home, the politicians went, as a matter of course. Mr. Roswell Upright was a frequent

patron of the St. Troplas dining-room. Fremont and Winifred often saw him there. He was always seated where Fremont, at the little table where they sat, could look across and see the county boss impressively dining. One day the first of the numerous shocks which Fremont was to receive in his study of county government, came to him as he and Winifred discussed one of Susan's delicious chicken potpies.

Mr. Upright had been favored by the company of Mr. Buckner Gowdy at dinner, and they had apparently been having a very jolly time. The manner in which they dropped their voices at times might have led one to think that very secret political matters were under discussion; but that would have done Mr. Gowdy an injustice. He ignored politics. He even refused to join the Grand Army of the Republic, or to associate himself in any save a business way with the people about him. But he and Mr. Upright had similar tastes in anecdote, and subdued voices were called for in their narration. Nothing, however, could hold Mr. Gowdy from business, and he rose abruptly in what was for Mr. Upright the middle of the meal, and went away leaving the great man of county political management alone with the potpie. This he attacked with energy and success, sweeping back his black mustache and scooping the stuffing and gravy into his mouth over his black goatee with his knife, seizing the bone of a leg with his fingers, inserting the drumstick in his mouth and bringing it out as clean of meat as a toothpick. He was an interesting if not a horrifying sight, to two Boston gentlemen who came into the dining-room with our great lawyer, Mr. N. V. Creede, and in the absence of other vacant places were seated with Mr. Creede at the table with Mr. Upright. Mr. Upright nodded to the group, demolished another chicken leg, which he followed with a huge knifeful of dressing, and washed the whole down with a gigantic cup of fragrant coffee.

"I brought you in here, gentlemen," said Mr. Creede, "because it is really, in spite of a certain primitiveness of equipment, the best place in Monterey County to get real food."

"I think Mr. Jeffries will agree with me," rejoined one of the Massachusetts gentlemen who answered to the name of Mr. Ropes, "that in reality food is the first quality to be insisted upon."

"I don't find," said Mr. Jeffries, "that insisting upon it does much good at most of the places where we have eaten in Iowa. It is like insisting upon reality in public benefits from the taxes we are paying on our lands out here. That is the real question before us, Mr. Creede. That is what Mr. Ropes and I have come out here to discover, if we can."

Mr. Upright shot a sharp glance at the two strangers, winked solemnly at N. V., and cut off the point of a triangle of mince pie which he poised on the point of his knife as he waited for the next remark. N. V. was plainly uneasy as the two visitors from the Hub went on with their attack on our county government.

"We have made up our minds," said Mr. Ropes, "if we are to be entirely frank——"

"Certainly," said N. V.; Mr. Upright, who had not as yet taken part in a conversation in which it could scarcely have been supposed that he had any interest, nodded much in the manner of a judge on the bench, who recognizes a good point when made by an attorney.

"Well, then," went on Mr. Ropes, "we have made up our minds that the county governments in the counties in Iowa in which we and our associates have been so unfortunate as to invest in lands, have been very unlucky in their selection of county officers. We think, in fact, that whenever you have found an escaped convict among you, you must have elected him to county office; and once in, he

has formed an alliance with the nearest horse-thief, to whom he has begun to let contracts for the building of school-houses, roads, bridges, court-houses and other public improvements—a great proportion of which have not been constructed—while the cost of those which have has been simply disguised robbery. Robbery, Mr. Creede, robbery! We have found it so in Lyon, in Sioux and other counties. We have found it so here, sir. We have been advised to consult with you in the matter, which we hope to do when we return to your office. There must be some remedy against the depredations of these thieves! They seem to consider the non-resident land-owner as their legitimate prey. Have you no such thing as honesty in your body politic?"

"Oh, yes, certainly we have!" protested Mr. Creede, who had writhed in this embarrassing situation, in which the two Boston men were telling something like the truth about the aquiline black-a-vised giant sitting across the table. He must do something to turn the conversation—and did. "I confess that I have not given the attention to these matters which perhaps I ought; but here's Mr. Upright who has been chairman of the Board of Supervisors several times, and who has been in the contracting business between whiles. He knows intimately where the taxes have gone. Perhaps he will be so kind as to explain. Mr. Ropes, let me introduce Mr. Upright; Mr. Jeffries, Mr. Upright."

Mr. Upright nodded majestically. Mr. Ropes and Mr. Jeffries were plainly abashed.

"From Boston, gentlemen?" inquired Mr. Upright.

"And what part of the East are you from?" asked Mr. Ropes after replying to Mr. Upright's question.

"I'm from every place but here," answered Mr. Upright, "an' from what I've heared lately, I'll soon be from here."

The jocular expression on the part of Raws Upright

was an old joke to Mr. Creede, but it puzzled Mr. Ropes. While he was pondering on the state of mind of a man who was from every place but here, and would soon be from here, his colleague in the investigation of the burden of taxation carried by the non-resident land-owner, took up the explanation of their position.

"We men of Massachusetts," said he, "do not wish to be misunderstood, Mr. Upright. We favor public improvements. We think good roads and bridges good things for our properties. We should regard ourselves as bad citizens if we shrank from the carrying of our share of the burden of building them for the communities in which we have invested our money. Especially do we favor the building of schoolhouses, and the support of the common schools. Massachusetts prides herself on her school system, maintained by taxation. All these are good things. But in our investigation of this matter in the counties of which Mr. Ropes has made mention in your hearing, and I may say in this county, in which we now understand you have borne so large, and I have no doubt, so honorable a part in the local government, we confess we have seen no roads, no bridges, no schoolhouses or other public buildings at all commensurate to the issues of bonds which have been made, nor the taxes levied on our lands. We are very glad to have met you, and hope our unguarded remarks may not have seemed offensive. No offense has been intended. Mr. Creede has said that you can tell us where our taxes have gone. We shall be glad to be set right if we are laboring under a mistake and doing your county government any injustice. We shall be glad to have you tell us in a general way, where our taxes *have* gone. What have you to show for these very heavy levies upon our properties? Our mission here is to find that out."

Mr. Upright, having finished his dinner, shoved back his chair, wiped his beard and rose.

"Perfectly natural question," said he, with another sly and unobserved wink at Mr. Creede. "Deserves a frank answer. I can't say what the other boys have to show for 'em; but as f'r me, I've got a good house, an' a damn good barn. Good day. See you ag'in, I hope!"

Winifred and Fremont passed out of the room while the gentlemen from the East were lying back in their chairs as if paralyzed from shock, looking first at each other and then at N. V., and beginning feebly to ask of the lawyer what in the world the man could mean. Did he mean this as a confession of his turpitude? What was the condition of things when such a shameless utterance could emanate from so influential a person in the community? Shocking! Shocking!

The episode troubled Fremont, and that evening he spoke of it to Captain Ashe, on the occasion of their regular evening's visit.

"Jest Raws's comical way," said the captain. "What did the Yankees say to it?"

"They didn't say anything while I was within hearing," said Fremont. "They seemed sort of squelched. What is there to the complaints they made?"

"Oh, nothing much," replied the captain. "You see, Freem, this is a new country. Things ain't settled down yet. When there were only a few settlers, and most o' the land was owned by speculators, we naturally forgot about that part of the law that called for the assessment of personal property and improvements. Why, damn it, how would you justify makin' a settler pay taxes on things he did that built up the value of every speculator's land in his neighborhood. Settlers made the land valuable. It's population that lifts the price o' land. And, by gosh! I say if we could 've let the settlers go scot-free of even what tax they did pay, their toughin' through the blizzards an' grasshoppers an' blight an' poverty would 've paid their

way so far as the state an' county was concerned. Look at your mother, now. Ought she to be taxed f'r buildin' up Iowa, draggin' up children, freezin' an' most starvin'? I ask you."

Fremont thought of the bran-bread tragedy, and admitted the captain's point.

"Wal," went on the captain, "that's why Raws and the crowd here in the Centre have always been elected. They've stood in with the settlers as ag'inst the non-residents. If Raws brags that he's got a good house and a damn good barn out o' the taxes, he's prob'ly safe in admittin' it. I think he's foolish, but he knows what he's doin' in Monterey County better'n I do. Folks like his hearty way of carryin' things off, an' that speech to them two Yankees'll be repeated and laughed at at every thrashing machine in the county. But things like that can't last always."

"You don't think they ought to, do you, father?" asked Fremont, whose ideas of government had been drunk from the pure font of George William Curtis and his fellows, rather than from the turbid pool of the county politics in which he was just a little bewildered to find himself immersed.

"I can see that they can't go on this way," said the captain. "Why? Because the speculators are getting out, and the land is goin' mostly into the hands of the farmers and such men as old Jason Holbrook—folks that live here. The Upright game will run on until folks find that it's eatin' 'em up, and then the easy stealin' 'll be over. It's a temporary thing. But I'll say that if the money we've gouged the non-residents out of could've been used on the square, the system was all right. An' the settlers sensed it that way, too."

They were a pleasant group that evening in the Ashe sitting-room. Paul Holbrook had come in with Mrs. Hamilton Smythe just after the captain's reference to "old Jason

Holbrook." She was a fair, plump young woman, the banker's lady, to whom Fremont had never spoken before. It seemed odd to our hero to see a young man walking with a young married woman, though at times he thought Paul was almost paying attentions to Catherine. Winifred was sitting across the room where she could catch Fremont's eye very often, and give him her little loving smile. May, slender, and still boyish, save for her great mass of black hair, was quarreling at times with Paul, her great ruddy brown eyes sparkling or growing pathetic or roguish as she played with her expression—an exercise of which she was quite fond. The captain sat smoking—he had given up his pipe since he became a public man, and smoked cigars. Catherine had some work in her hands over which she bent her brown head, looking up once in a while with her serious and kindly smile. They were a sort of chromatic scale in complexion, running from the dark of May up to the fairness approaching the blonde in Winifred, with her eyes the deep blue of cockle-bloom; and in form they varied from Catherine, taller and sturdier than Winifred, who was slender though symmetrical and womanly in figure, down to the lithe and dwarfish May. Mrs. Smythe had eyes almost as light blue as Fremont's, with a flaxen bang over them, and a way of deferring to men, looking up into their eyes so appealingly and so ingratiatingly that one almost expected her to attempt to crawl into the breast-pocket of the creature and nestle there. Her beautiful complexion and her plump figure were her strong points, plus that manner of hers; for her face, one could predict, would be very plain when once the Iowa winds had thickened that milky skin. Fremont began at once to put her into a story.

"I was just tellin' Fremont," said the captain, hoping that Paul had not heard his reference to the elder Mr. Holbrook, "about county matters an' what folks will say about what Raws told them Yankees to-day."

He repeated his little disquisition on local self-government. Paul sat for a while in thought.

"You've hit on the most important matter we've got to face; and we must face it pretty soon," said Paul. "I suppose we have drifted into this official lawlessness by degrees and because the people who paid the taxes were so many of them outsiders. But it is eating the heart out of our honesty."

"Not the honesty of the people themselves," said Fremont.

"I wonder if that's so," said Paul. "Mr. Ropes and Mr. Jeffries took dinner with us this evening. If you had been there you'd have had hard work to make them believe that our people individually don't average pretty scaly."

"But they don't," contended Fremont. "Where will you find a people whom you can more safely trust? Why, your father has been trusting them, and profiting by it, ever since he came to the county. My father could have beaten him out of debts we owed."

"Well, I guess you're right about that," admitted Paul, "but look at our county government! Even before that old scandal when some one stole the county funds under Judge Stone, down to Raws Upright's house and barn, the county government has been corrupt. It's so in other counties. And I should have been ashamed to admit to these gentlemen from the East the fact that we have in our county what must be an organized band of horse-thieves and robbers!"

"That's so," agreed Captain Ashe. "The time's comin' when that gang has got to be cleaned up."

Fremont thought of his old talk with Bent Bushyager in which he had been invited "to come in with them and know everything," of the ravine where he suspected that stolen horses had been secreted—and of the caucuses and

the conversation in which his father-in-law had been served by those suspected, as his political friends. And he sensed the captain's relief in having the conversation turned by Paul Holbrook away from the county irregularities to this other need of reform.

"How interesting!" exclaimed Mrs. Smythe. "When I came here from New England, I hoped I should find bandits. And now, Mr. McCorkey, this conversation sounds like a fairy-story to me, and just as delightful. It might run off into:

> "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
> All mimsy were the borogoves,
> And the mome rathes outgrabe.'"

"Why, what's that you were saying?" asked Fremont in astonishment.

"Don't you know it?" questioned Mrs. Smythe. "Don't you know your *Alice in Wonderland*?"

"Tell me more of it," said Fremont. "I never heard of it!"

Mrs. Smythe told him more of it. She finished "Jabberwocky" and repeated, "You are old, Father William," and talked of the Cheshire Cat and the Mock Turtle and the King and Queen of Hearts, the Gryphon and the Lobster Quadrille.

"But 'Jabberwocky,'" said Paul Holbrook, "is in *Through the Looking-Glass*."

"You shouldn't show up my ignorance in that way, Paul," said Mrs. Smythe. "Just like a lawyer! Your part of Lewis Carroll literature is the verses:

> "'Fury said to a mouse that he met in the house,
> Let us both go to law, I will prosecute you!
> Come, I'll take no denial, we must have a trial;
> For really this morning I've nothing to do.'"

"Well," said Paul, "I might say that to any mouse I happened to meet, so far as my law practise is concerned."

"But who wrote this that you're quoting?" asked Fremont.

"Lewis Carroll," replied Mrs. Smythe. "Really, haven't you read it? I'll lend it to you. I envy you. I wish I had it to read again for the first time."

Poor Fremont! When people began talking about the books that had not come in his way, in his strange and isolated intellectual life, how ignorant he felt himself to be! He could repeat those great passages from the school readers by Shakespeare, Milton, Coleridge, Byron and their fellow-divinities of prose, by the hour. He knew intimately a limited number of the poems of the American group of poets who had contributed to *Our Young Folks,* and as for the blood-and-thunder tales, the hectic society novels of the weekly story-papers, he was a specialist in them; but in this Mrs. Smythe he had found a person who seemed to know books with a vocabulary of odd words like, snark, jabberwock and the like, of which he had never even heard. Was there a language of culture which one must learn to be anybody? There must be, for Paul Holbrook knew all about it. Fremont, who was not without pride in his literary attainments, built up from the time when he had put Bent Bushyager in his place with his "Peter-Rice-Eats-Fish" coup, was ashamed; for it seemed that he had learned his English literature as he had done his botany, out of books which were a generation behind the times. He had learned a literary Linnæus when he should have been reading this Lewis Carroll! He was humbled.

Fremont thanked Mrs. Smythe for her offer to lend him *Alice in Wonderland* and tried to pay attention to what Captain Ashe and Paul were now discussing in relation to the problems of lawlessness: how the sheriff of Scott County had traced a herd of stolen horses to the river just north of

Lithopolis, and lost them. How the station agent of the railway at a little town west of them had started to the bank with a consignment of money which had come by express, and been struck down and robbed, and was now in danger of death. How one of the Tewksburys, a well-to-do farmer in the north part of the county, had less than two years before disappeared after drawing out of the bank the money from the sale of his wheat crop, and had never been heard of since. True, people thought he had absconded, but no one could show any reason for that; and how about the farmer's wife in another place who, being wakeful one morning last year, had walked out about three o'clock in the morning and found some men loading her husband's fat hogs into a wagon; men who had told her to go straight into the house, if she knew what was good for her and her family, and keep her damn' mouth shut. Which (barring the expletive) she and her family had done, and the thieves had got off scot-free with the porkers.

"That's what I call bold!" said the captain. "And it won't go down with me when they tell me that it's what's left of the old Graves gang that Mark Owsley turned state's evidence on, and that come in from the outside. If they hain't got help right here amongst us, how do they come it over us the way they do? I'm for the Anti-Horse-Thief Association, even if it does come to settin' up a Judge Lynch Court."

"I'm not for lynching," said Paul, who was Fremont's leader in the George William Curtis cult, and was subsequently, much to his father's disgust, that awful thing for Iowa, a Mugwump. "We must stamp out this lawlessness, both in government and out of it, by peaceful and orderly means. And our work is cut out for us in Monterey County. Maybe when the influx of new people comes with the new railroad and shops and factories and the wholesale houses, we'll have a new kind of public

opinion. I hope so—— Well, Mrs. Smythe, I promised your husband I'd return you ere this hour!"

Fremont had been lost for some minutes, ever since the "slithy toves" came into the conversation at "brillig." Now he came to life, and looked over at Winifred. She was looking the other way, and when he had allowed his eyes to rest on her for a moment or two without any glance in his direction on her part, he felt that something was wrong. She had never for so long a time in all these months failed to throw him a tender glance in such a period of time as this. Paul Holbrook and Mrs. Smythe departed. Fremont thought that Paul held Catherine's hand slightly longer than was absolutely necessary. Still Winnie failed to look at him, and when he put his arm about her waist and said that it was time for them to be going or Mr. Trickey would have the St. Troplas locked up for the night, she remarked, almost crossly, that she didn't care if he locked his old hotel up and never opened it.

Fremont, as they walked along in silence, quoted to himself—he would have found something to quote if he had been burning at the stake—the lines about the little "rift within the lute."

"What's the matter, darling?" he asked when they had reached their shabby room.

"It's easy to say, 'darling,'" said she, ignorant of the fact as to the revolution it took to make a McConkey say it at all, "but you didn't act much as if I were your darling!"

"When didn't I?" inquired the astonished Fremont.

"Back there when you were talking with the smily little Mrs. Smythe!" said Winifred, with tears in her eyes. "You had no eyes for anybody but her for a long, long time. I c-c-can't stand it not to have you look at me!"

"Why, Winnie!" protested Fremont. "And I tried to catch your eye ever so long, and you looked the other way!"

"That was afterward!" said the bride, wiping away her tears. "I know I can't talk books, and 'toves' and things. I know I'm not intellectual like her! But you used to love me just the same—you used to!"

The young husband's task now was to show her that he still loved her, that she was the only girl in the world to him, and that she just didn't happen to see him when he looked at her; and that he was so interested in this new field of books they were talking of, that he didn't know where he was; and that even though he were cast away on a desert island with the Queen of England or the "Light of the Harem" (with whom he had intimate acquaintance) there wouldn't be a moment, day or night, no matter what he was or wasn't looking at, when the thought of Winifred would not be with him like the sweet strains of remembered music! I think he did rather well; but before he was quite pardoned, and while Winifred was making her last feeble resistance, she made use of this their first tiff:

"If you love me so much," said she, "why do you keep me here in this horrid old hotel?"

"Why," said he, "I thought I would show people that we are independent, as a young couple should be. I think that house we were looking at will do, don't you, when those other people move; and by that time we can afford to buy what furniture we need. And then we will be all by ourselves. Won't you be happy then?"

"I want Cathie!" said Winifred. "And father and Cathie and May all want us to come home. I have to see Cathie every day, Neatherd! Father is always talking to you about it. Why be so—so—so set in this matter? You can pay father whatever is right. Let's go home where Cathie can do things for me as she always has. We'll all be happier. It will be Heaven for me—to have you and Cathie and father and May. Be good, Fremont, and prove to me

that you don't wish you had married a girl who knows about jabberwocks and Cheshire Cheeses, darling!"

You know what happened. The St. Troplas lost its favorite guests, and the prophecy of the *Journal* about Fremont and the "dust and Ashes" came true.

CHAPTER II

THE POLISHING OF MC CONKEY

"HE CERTAINLY has got rid of his clodhopper looks quick," said Sheriff Charlie Fleming. "Why, he'll be wearing a number seven boot, if he stays in this great city long."

Albert Junkins, County Auditor, finished filing and docketing a bill against the county before answering.

"You mean young McConkey?" he asked. "Well, he *has* changed in his ways and looks since the captain brought him to town. He *was* a clodhopper to look at, wasn't he? But from what I can see he's an efficient deputy."

"Nice thing for the captain," said Joe Zentz, the County Treasurer. "Fillmore likes a change of work pretty often. It would gravel the captain like the devil to write up all the records of the clerk's office, now that they begin to fill so many books. Providence certainly is good to the sheriff, with all this litigation and his fees piling up—and poor Freem McConkey has to buck off the straw of the sheriff's machine there in those books in the clerk's office. Nice little job he got with his nice little wife, but he'll earn all his money, just the same. Folks have quit asking what Winnie saw in him. Darned if he ain't getting to be a sort of six-foot dude—and conversation! He's got any one else in this court-house skinned when it comes to that. Makes me feel plumb illiterate. Where he got all that stuff is a mystery."

"It's the American way," said Mr. Fleming, who was convinced that every excellence inhered in American institutions and Americans, never having read Mr. Dickens, nor much else. "The greatest people on earth, gentlemen. Look at Lincoln. He was a clodhopper, too. Readin' by the light of pine knots—that's all a boy wants in this country, sir—that and a good American ancestry, by George!"

"An' Lincoln's wife didn't stick half as close to him as Winnie does to Freem," said Joe Zentz. "Winnie never seems to have any doubts as to the kind of treasure she's got. The Siamese twins are total strangers by the side of 'em! She's down here hours before he's ready to go home at noon and night; an' my wife says she's a mourner without comfort when court's in session so Freem's tied up in the court room."

"The women kind of make fun of her clingin'-vine way," said Mr. Junkins, "but I'd kind o' like to have Winnie hang around me—if I wasn't so darned old, and so forth—in a theoretical sort of way, you know."

"I know," said the sheriff, with the cheerful laugh that got him so many votes. "And so does Joe. Still, a feller may like a vacation from connubial bliss once in a while, you know."

"It's their business," replied Mr. Zentz. "And it don't generally last always."

"Sometimes I think it's like a supply of liquor," said Fleming. "Lasts longer if you don't get too everlastingly drunk on it when it first comes."

"Well," said the treasurer, "you ought to know about that, Charlie."

"How about that supply you laid in on what was left of the election consignment, Al?" retorted the sheriff—and the conversation became no part of this history.

The county-seat crowd—some people called it the "ring"—consisted of the five offices on the ground floor of

the court-house—the treasurer, the auditor, the clerk of the courts, the recorder of deeds (Rudolph Meyer, conceded to the growing German vote), and the sheriff, together with their deputies and clerks. The county superintendent of schools was also a member but having no functions more important than the welfare of our children, ranked, of course, distinctly below the rest, and had his office on the top floor back of the court room, where it was frequently used as a jury room when court was in session. The state senator and the member of the lower house were also counted in, but were not in residence. What may be called the "Big Five" had the advantage of being always at home. The reader may observe that Fremont McConkey had done much in the way of fitting himself into his niche. They were already expressing surprise at his progress in throwing off his clodhopperishness.

They little knew what took place in his soul. As a matter of fact, while he wrote page after page of records in the big books of the clerk's office, and spent many days behind his desk in the court room, handing out packets of papers to lawyers—who were getting to be a numerous class in the growing town—taking receipts for these documents, calling the names of jurors to fill the chairs in trials, and gradually feeling his way out into what almost any one would have called a larger world; while he had learned how to dress as did other people about him; while the callouses softened on his hands, and peeled off, leaving them soft and pink—the callouses on his soul, which had been made by his long life on the farm, still remained.

I wonder if I can tell how this manifested itself. Well, for one thing, he was always conscious of a little feeling of guilt, as if he were shirking a duty. When he rose long after sunrise, he had this sensation of guilt. He should have been in the field long since! It was not so pronounced in winter, though even then, as he lay in his warm

bed with his young wife sleeping so rosily by his side, and the snow blowing in a frigid mist through the town, he would awake with a start with the impression that the stock needed care, and that he should be out shoveling snow from the pens, filling the mangers with hay. As the town grew under the influence of its boom from the building of the second railway, and the rumors that new lines were coming in to get the advantages of the traffic of the new trade center which was growing up, the thrashing-machine music seldom penetrated into the little city, but on still autumn mornings it did so occasionally for a year or so, and Fremont never heard it but he felt that little absurd twinge of conscience that he would be late to work. The fragrance of new-turned furrows disturbed him somewhat. The waves of shadow on the ripening wheat called him as to some task shirked. The whispering maize of July, as it stood in its straight rows, its burgeoning stalks slanting in the prairie breeze, seemed to say to him, "We are the green hosts of that God who dropped manna for His children's sustenance. Why are you not marching with us, softening the bed for our roots, freeing us from the spies, deserters and traitors of the weeds, giving drink to our lips through the water you hold for us in the cups of your furrows? Are you also turned against us?" He would smile at the ridiculousness of it. I wonder whether in that ominous desertion of the soil which our world has seen in its steady, and, I sometimes suspect, fundamentally wicked industrialization, the human race has not suffered a shock to its collective conscience of which Fremont McConkey's queer little trouble is typical?

The court-house crowd thought that he was adjusting himself to the new life as a duck adjusts itself to water; but it was a long process. He seemed to himself an outsider even while he was giving Captain Ashe so much gratification through his efficiency as an officer. The law-

yers liked him. The judges were fond of him. The public came to depend upon him for service in the office. He was irritated at himself because he felt that he was playing a false part, and that this was not his work. It was much of it very interesting work, but it presented itself to him as a thing he was studying as if for the purpose of passing a sort of examination, and was in itself no more important than the pages of some text-book; a very interesting text-book in certain passages, and not worse than somewhat dull in others, but something to be thrown aside when he was through with it.

As a matter of truth he was still seeking impressions for things he expected to write; and disappointed because he found so little of the materials which those writers would have utilized whose works he had read, who always looked elsewhere or elsewhen, or both, for their materials. When Bowie Bushyager was arrested on suspicion of being implicated in a horse-stealing matter, and Virgil Jackson, Sally's husband, bailed him out after a hearing in which Mark Owsley seemed as active in managing the defense as N. V. Creede, his actual counsel, and when the grand jury, after investigating the affair failed to indict, Fremont only wished the parties had been a little more foreign or ancient so that he could have made a story of it. So when a woman who was testifying against her husband in a suit for divorce, refused to tell the name of the woman with whom he had committed adultery, but with the consent of the bench, whispered it in the judge's ear, it seemed rather a crude and quite inartistic performance, quite devoid of material for the writer—she was such a plain woman, with a red birthmark on her neck. Even when the judge trembled, wrote in his docket notes for a decree of divorce for this woman, and then left the bench and adjourned court until the next term, Fremont only thought it queer. When, however, it appeared that the whispered name was that of the

judge's wife, and that the magistrate at once filed a petition for divorce against her, based on that whispered name, he did see the tragedy of it. He thought of the dignified judge asking for the name to be pronounced in court of this woman taken in adultery; of the refusal of the injured woman to testify out of regard for the judge himself; of the judge's reluctant consent to hear the name as whispered in his ear; and of his rending of soul when she slew him with the name of his own wife!

If that story could be given some locale where judges wore robes, now—but he was such a funny little man, and so common, with all of his dignity!

This took place at the time when Fremont had given up writing, as it seemed to him, forever; notwithstanding which he still went on feeling the world as a mine for materials just the same. His stories which Winifred had been so sure would make them able to go to that South Sea Island and live a life of uninterrupted dalliance, had come back to him in due course of mail. He saw now that they were not like other men's stories, hard as he had tried to make them similar to the best models in their various styles. That, he thought, must be the reason why none of the editors had even expressed a desire to see any more of his work. It was a dark period for Fremont—as dark as it could be, darker than he could hope to make any one understand that it was, for a boy of twenty-one or so, married to his heart's best love, and getting nine hundred dollars a year as a member of the group—sometimes called the "ring"—which was running the affairs of this great agricultural county, as it was beginning to call itself, and many of the concerns of the booming city of Monterey, which suddenly found itself in one of those strange geological formations known only to the commercial map-makers, in which heavy black lines radiate in all directions, showing

to what a surprising extent Mudville, or Porkopolis has become the Center of Things.

Fremont sometimes wondered how Thackeray or Dickens would have handled a city boom; but made up his mind that both of them must have considered the thing and rejected it as unfit for literature.

After a year or so of this, Fremont suddenly started with astonishment at the realization that during all this time he had not read a single book—except *Alice in Wonderland* which he had, in a little fit of stubbornness against Winifred's coldness to anything proposed by Mrs. Smythe, borrowed and read in those rare moments when he had leisure unshared by his wife. The fact is, he had read it secretly while apparently entering up orders of court, judgments and decrees in the big books in the clerk's office. He was regretful that he could not discuss *Alice in Wonderland* with Winifred. It delighted him. It relieved him, too, to know that it did not represent a great field of literature of which he had never heard, but was only Lewis Carroll's fun. He had begun to hear of *The Rubaiyat* and of a man named Swinburne, some of whose haunting sweetness appeared occasionally in the newspapers; but there was now nobody with whom he could talk of them. He was no longer on terms of intimate inquiry with Paul Holbrook, for reasons which will presently appear.

He had now begun to think that he must be at fault in his relations with Winifred, since she was not giving forth the exaltation of inspiration which he had felt when she went to see him as he plowed in the field, or when they sat in their secret ecstasy at the time of the discovery of the swan's nest among the reeds in the parlor during the Institute. It was his fault, he was sure, for should not such inspiration be mutual? And it was not mutual, now. Winifred seemed content for him to be deputy clerk of the

courts; and began to talk of their life in Monterey as if it were to be a permanent thing, like Paul Holbrook's, or the Smythe boy's—a life in which she would be perfectly happy with him, and with Catherine. She needed him more than ever by her side now, and when he was not present, she must have Cathie; for Winifred was in that condition in which it used to be said all wives who really love their husbands most desire to find themselves. Her fervor for Art, he has sometimes thought since, had always been a fervor for the ancient Art of love and courtship, and now it was absorbed in her love for him. The man who could complain of this would be a traitor—and he did not complain. He condemned himself for even thinking that he could have complained if he had been capable of it, if I make myself clear.

Not that he was unhappy. He was very happy. Not that his happiness was unalloyed, either; but the alloy was none of his dear girl's fusing. He was a little troubled about Captain Ashe. The captain had been greatly bloated in pride by his victory at the caucuses and at the polls. He was sufficient of a politician not to allow this to appear in his demeanor; but he confided in Fremont, whom he had in the heartiest manner adopted as his son. He was a thorough good fellow, but he was quite vainglorious over his triumph. It seemed to him that his problem of life was solved. He talked familiarly of the Clarksons and of Congressmen Gillette, Weller and Weaver, who were everything bad, being Greenbackers. Weaver he put in outer darkness by calling him "The Widow Weaver," because that gentleman was fond of repeating that his party had left him; and Weller was always "Calamity Weller." Captain Ashe's chief enthusiasm was for Governor Gear, N. M. Hubbard, J. W. Blythe, Thomas F. Withrow and John F. Duncombe. The latter could receive from him only qualified praise, because he was a Democrat, but an able man all the

same. During Gear's administration, and at the time when Fremont was feeling his way up to glory, as most people would have said, and out of the Slough of Despond on the farm, where he had only the prairie and the prairie grass, flowers and skies, and Tennyson and fragments of his fellows as companions, in place of the county organization in Monterey, Captain Ashe went to Des Moines on a pass issued by Hubbard, Withrow or Duncombe, who managed the lobby which caused the repeal of the Granger Railway Laws. The lobby was the greatest hitherto seen in Iowa. It went to express the popular demand for the repeal of the laws which established the legal rates for freights and passenger traffic. This demand (on the part of such citizens as went to the capital on the Hubbard-Withrow-Duncombe passes) was unanimous. The grangers had tied up the railways in a double-bow-knot, they told the Legislature, because the law-makers had been scared by a lot of trouble-makers among the farmers, such as we have seen in action at Crabapple Grove the time they made Governor Wade make his speech with that "dirty political rag" upheld by the Vandemark Township Grange in the persons of Jacobus T. Vandemark, Absalom Frost, Foster Blake and their fellows. Their Anti-Monopoly Party had seemed a fizzle; but the Granger Laws followed. The railways for the first time felt the curb of the law. The towns and cities were well organized by the astute politicians I have mentioned, who were great lawyers, and attorneys for great transportation companies, with their agents and beneficiaries in every part of the state.

Do not condemn Captain Ashe too severely. If you had lived in Monterey at that time, and especially if you had had an interest in some "addition" of town lots out of which you expected to get rich by the rise in land values through the growth of the town, you would have thought N. M. Hubbard a far better guide for Governor Gear and

the Legislature than Absalom Frost of the grangers. For the railways held Monterey in the hollow of their hand. They could make or unmake. You may argue that the way to handle the matter was to take from them the power to make and unmake, and that is what Uncle Jake Vandemark said to Fremont one day when he and Winifred went out in strawberry time to feast on the berries growing in Vandemark's Folly Slew; but how could a deputy clerk of the courts, whose tenure of office depended so much on the votes of all these new citizens which the railways were bringing in as workers in the yards, round-houses and machine-shops, and on the influence of Blythe, Hubbard, Duncombe and Withrow and their fellow-manipulators of railway political power, be expected to take this view of it, especially while bathed in the atmosphere of what was termed "progress and advancement"?

Our own deputy clerk of the courts, who had lined up behind the Anti-Monopoly banner with Uncle Jake that Fourth of July day when Dorinda Doughty had gone back on him, was quite orthodox in his politics now, and talked as fluently in favor of the repeal of the Granger Laws and of giving the railways a free hand in the development of the country, in which they had a common interest with all the rest of us, as if the whole subject had not been strange to him when he taught the Vandemark School. And Mr. Vandemark was obliged to admit the force of his arguments. For one thing, the railway was making Uncle Jake rich. It had done as it agreed with him when he and N. V. Creede, its local attorney and his old friend, had accepted his terms for its right of way the whole length of his farm—that is, it had made a drainage-ditch alongside of the track, which was making his old swamp farm arable land, richer than mud. It was putting a station at Ploverdale a mile from his house. Maybe, said Uncle Jake, the grangers had gone too far in hampering the railways. And as the whole

eight hundred acres would be under cultivation next year, a third of it under the management of Fremont's brother Henry, Mr. Vandemark's son-in-law, and there wouldn't be any more wild strawberries after this, they'd better go into the house and eat them while they were to be had in their wild state. Fremont was gratified at his success in lining up so strong a man as Mr. Vandemark.

This would be an unjustifiable interpolation in this history, were it not for the light it throws on the spiritual development of Fremont McConkey. Perhaps it is so, anyhow. Let us bring it to a close, and return to the spiritual condition of Captain Ashe.

The captain was sure that he was a most capable politician. He was hand in glove with Raws Upright, now, and Raws Upright was cheek-by-jowl with the Board of Supervisors and with county as well as railway contracts. He had the contract for the uniform system of sidewalks in the city, as they called it now, too; and there were dreamers who talked of paved streets—dreamers whose visions were often inspired by the psychic influence of Mr. Roswell Upright. The captain was sure that if he himself were to take complete control of the organization, as he hinted to Fremont that night, he would not make some of the cracks that Raws was uttering, like what he said to the two Boston men about the house and barn, or to Paul Holbrook about the bridge contract.

Fremont had heard this latest of Mr. Upright's *bon mots*. There had been a bridge contract to be let, crossing Plum Creek in the south part of the county. Paul Holbrook was now a member of a Citizens' Committee, consisting of sore-heads, as Captain Ashe said, and trouble-makers, and mossbacks, and was the legal adviser of this committee. This explains the coolness between him and Fremont McConkey. Paul had his eye on the Plum Creek bridge project as a source of what we have learned to call "graft"

going to Roswell Upright. It had been whispered about that when this contract was awarded, if everything were not regular, Paul was going into court and ask for an injunction in the public interest. Young Holbrook was out of town for a few days, during which time the Board of Supervisions let the contract for the Plum Creek bridge. When he returned he spoke to several people about his intentions in the way of court proceedings. One day Fremont and Mr. Upright were exchanging a few words of chat on the court-house steps, when Paul Holbrook passed.

"Hello, Paul," said Raws.

"Good morning, Mr. Upright," replied Holbrook.

"May I have a word with you?" asked Upright.

"Certainly," said Paul, shrinking, as a young man well might, who scented combat with the great man of the county's politics, in the presence of a gathering group of citizens.

"I take notice," said Raws, in his most dignified manner, "that you are interested in public affairs—in county contracts. Now I like that, sir. Too many of our smart young men, especially them that's been to college, an' belong to influential families like you, jest simply ignore politics and public matters. I'm glad you ain't like that. Now about this Plum Creek bridge contract—I understand you're interested in that?"

"I am, sir," said Paul, blushing under Upright's dominating and patronizing manner, "but not selfishly as I believe you are."

"Young man," said Raws, "when I ain't interested selfishly I ain't interested at all! I understand that you're thinking of getting out an injunction ag'inst the buildin' of the Plum Creek bridge."

"If I am correctly informed as to the deal," said Paul, "I shall go into court with it."

"Good distinction you make there," said Upright. "If you're correctly informed! Always be sure of your facts, and you'll succeed as a lawyer. I'm ready to help you with the facts, because I'm interested in you. I like you. Do you know I got a written contract for buildin' that bridge?"

Paul looked puzzled. He had learned nothing of the written contract, and, being an inexperienced lawyer, he was trying to fathom Mr. Upright's purpose in mentioning it to him.

"I have not read the contract," said he at last, "and it won't make any difference anyhow. I shall ask for the injunction just the same."

"Glad to see you firm in your views," said Mr. Upright, still apparently solicitous that Paul should not make any legal error. "Well, did you know that I've got my pay a' ready from the county for buildin' the bridge? I have you know. Now go ahead and injunct all you please. I never meant to build the damned bridge anyway!"

"Now that," said the captain to Fremont in confidence, "was a fool thing to say, right out the way he said it, even if he is darned strong with the voters and the banks where the bonds are handled, and the money deposited. If I were in his place—"

The captain clearly harbored the notion that he might be called on to take Raws's place. As for Fremont, it is only fair to say for him that he never took Mr. Upright's remark except in the light of a joke. He never knew whether Plum Creek bridge was finally built in pursuance of that contract or not. It was lost in the confusion of county affairs; a confusion growing out of the existence of a well organized group of men, spending the taxes paid at first by non-residents in the main, and levied on a community which had not had time to become knit into a body politic for the rest, and under the worst system of government ever devised, the county government of America.

Mr. Ashe began spending more and more of his time outside of his office hours in places where he could feel that he was solidifying his popularity, or getting solid with the boys as he called it. These places were many, but the saloons were the spots where solidification took place with the greatest degree of spontaneity. He often came home in a state of intense amiability resulting in lack of coordination of the muscles. Not that he was drunk—far from it; but he was carrying his load with some difficulty. At such times he told Fremont, who had taken his place as the only dependable man of the house, that when the next caucuses came, he would see something. That something was never explained, but it was clearly to be something great.

In the meantime, Fremont wondered sometimes whether or not the captain was at all times quite so completely capable of managing the financial affairs of his office. Its receipts of money had multiplied since the town began its sudden development from a village of five hundred to a town of three or four thousand. Old lawsuits were in process of settlement. Lands which had mortgages foreclosed upon them were now worthy of, and were receiving, increased loans; and bills of costs were paid off putting many considerable sums in the hands of the clerk of the courts. Much other old litigation was being cleared off in the same way. Fresh litigation was active, owing to the many new projects under way, filing fees were numerous, and all the streams of income to the clerk's office were running bankfull. The captain's deposit was an attractive one for the new and old banks. When Paul Holbrook began what the court-house crowd called his "mousing around," Captain Ashe had removed his account from the First National Bank, which was now the name of the old Holbrook & Smythe institution, and transferred it to the Monterey State Bank, of which Mr. James Boyd, once the village blacksmith, then sheriff, and later as always an active poli-

tician, was president. Of this bank, Mr. Roswell Upright was a director. And Mr. Upright had been more than usually in evidence in the company of Captain Ashe, in the office and on the streets, about the time of the transfer of the account. The experienced observer might have seen in these underground financial movements a lining up of local capital for and against the "county ring," as it was beginning to be called about the First National. The indignation of the people was gathering in Jason Holbrook's bank vaults.

But Fremont was quite ignorant of these mutterings of the local thunder-storm. He was tied to the side of Winifred by those golden cords which never galled, but surely did confine him. She was not interested in the books he now wished to read. He had borrowed from N. V. Creede a set of Gibbon and Spencer's *Social Statics* and *The Origin of Species*—a new world—a marvelous world; but for the first time in his life, notwithstanding the call of the soil in times past, he found himself in possession of books which he was unable to read. Poor Winifred was the cause of the Tantalus phase of the banquet; for she in her condition had lost the sympathy she had formerly shown for Fremont in his intellectual strivings. She had gone back to the things her mother used to love, and Fremont spent hours daily reading to her the novels of Mary J. Holmes and the stories in the weekly story-papers. He read them dutifully, but he was now disgusted with them. He wondered how he could ever have been so crazy about them—but Winifred listened to them with tense interest, and talked to him about how this story was coming out, and whether that character was to turn out a bad or a good person, while Catherine sewed on baby clothes and looked after the work of the house, now aided by a hired girl which their new affluence enabled them to keep, while May sometimes made a show of helping Catherine, but often went to sleep as Fremont's

voice droned on in the reading of sensational stories of love and adventure. They were really a very happy family—but Fremont marveled at himself for allowing Gibbon and Spencer to lie there unopened day after day, save when he arose sometimes in the night, lighted a lamp and read for a while. He would have done more of this, had it not been for the fact that this new work in the office, and the captain's need, of which Joe Zentz had spoken, of a change of work pretty often, had resulted in overwhelming him with his accumulation of work. It became such a burden that, after tearful protests on the part of Winifred, who felt that it would be indelicate for her to go with him to sit by his side as she would formerly have done, he adopted the practise of going back to his office and working at night. This he did with a qualm of conscience at his feeling of relief over his escape from Mrs. Holmes.

He heard a step in the hall one night, and a tap at his door. He was greatly surprised on opening it to see standing there, Mr. J. Buckner Gowdy, the great land magnate of the county, whose holding had been a liability to him until the advance in land values, which was now rapidly converting him into a millionaire, and to whose Blue Grass Manor Fremont's herd had strayed so long ago. Mr. Gowdy stepped in and walked over to the book in which Fremont had been writing.

"Didn't I send you," said he, pronouncing the "I" in his Kentucky way, so that it sounded like "Ah" to Fremont, "a book on Double-Entry Bookkeeping?"

"You did," answered Fremont, as if it had occurred only yesterday. "With 'an infallible rule for debtor and creditor.'"

"Well," said Mr. Gowdy, "you see what it's brought you to. Here you are keepin' books. Just as the twig is bent, you know. Much to do here?"

"It keeps me out of mischief," admitted Fremont.

"Too much, then," said Mr. Gowdy judiciously. "Far too much for any man, if it really does that. Slavery! Why don't you get another deputy in here?"

"The board of supervisors," said Fremont, "has not provided for any more assistance."

"They could do that," said Mr. Gowdy, "out of some Plum Creek bridge saving. But saving, of course, isn't the argument. I can read the records you are writing up, but a genius like you can't be expected to write well enough to fit him for the care of these illuminated missals—penmanship, I mean. I've heard that Thorkelson boy, whatever his name is—your old pupil in the Vandemark district—is a fine scribe—the fiddler, you know."

Fremont knew that Mr. Gowdy referred to Owen Lovejoy Gowdy, his own illegitimate son by Rowena Fewkes, wedded with her infant in her arms to Magnus Thorkelson, that solid Norwegian citizen who had so long ago sought Mr. Gowdy's life with his shotgun in his hand—old history. It was the first time so far as Fremont had heard, that the father had ever mentioned the son.

"He's a fine penman," said Fremont.

"Could you handle him if he was in here?" asked Mr. Gowdy.

"I don't know of any one I'd rather have," answered Fremont.

"Well," said Mr. Gowdy, "you're pretty strong with the captain, and if the thing is brought up, you might say a good word for him."

"I shall be glad to," said Fremont. "We certainly need him, or some one. I am snowed under with work."

"Well, tell him that, too," urged Mr. Gowdy. "Tell him you can't do the work. I think it can be managed—if we keep our own counsel, and do a little work."

Fremont thought he understood Buck Gowdy's interest in the work of the clerk's office. He was showing a strange

affection for this son of his, heretofore so sedulously ignored and repudiated. Fremont's heart warmed a little to the cynical, rapacious libertine of Blue Grass Manor. When that gentleman came, however, with Raws Upright to talk with the captain about the matter of additional help in the office, which Fremont had duly requested, the conversation, which they took no pains to keep from Fremont's ears, fell perceptibly short of supporting this impulse toward praise of the finer instincts of Mr. Gowdy.

"You need him," said Mr. Gowdy. "You say he's from the same part of the county as our young Neatherd here, and that it wouldn't be good politics to appoint him; but I ask you whether it isn't good politics to appoint any man that Raws here, and Fremont McConkey, and I want, no matter where he comes from? I ask you!"

"Well, yes it is," said the captain, "if you fellers'll agree to remember it when the time comes."

"Sure, we'll remember it," said Raws.

"It'll be my only political obligation," said Mr. Gowdy. "I'll not forget that you've given this young man something better to do than to fiddle for country dances."

Well, thought Fremont, perhaps it was a sort of paternal affection after all; or perhaps only a feeling that if Owen insisted on going by the name of Gowdy instead of Thorkelson, the cognomen which a rude delicacy on the part of the people attempted to bestow on him, Gowdy preferred that it should not be common currency at dances. Owen came into the office. He was given the immense salary of seventy dollars a month; and Fremont, that the difference between his own stipend and that of his inferior might be adequate, was advanced to a thousand dollars a year. He celebrated his good fortune by buying at once a horse and a covered buggy. Luxury at last!

CHAPTER III

A HURRYING TIME OF YEAR

IN THE society in which Fremont had been born and reared, an increase in the family was a matter turned over to the women, save for the intrusion of the family doctor. The father's duties were confined to the task of seeing that the proper functionaries were in attendance. These functionaries were Fremont's mother, who was now the principal counselor and adviser of Winifred, and still more of Catherine, and Doctor Bliven, who took the whole matter in a spirit so casual and matter-of-fact that doubts sometimes arose in the minds of Winifred and Fremont as to the doctor's fitness for his office. Catherine was quite sure that he did not take the crisis with sufficient seriousness. She confided this to Fremont, but assured Winifred that she had every confidence in the doctor. Winifred must be reassured. Mrs. McConkey stood by Doctor Bliven. She had seen him in action, and knew him. As for May, now a fascinating, Spanish-looking young woman, she was conclusively presumed to be in ignorance of the situation; though when she came to the doctor's office that day and said that Catherine wanted to see him at the house, she was in such a state of excitement as to make the maintenance of this delicate presumption difficult.

Catherine was pale with apprehension and agitation, her hands trembling as she grasped Fremont's, and her sweet maternal face the picture of loving solicitude. She told

him that she had sent a team to the farm for his mother and had left word for Doctor Bliven to come at once.

"I can't think *why* he doesn't come," she exclaimed. "Oh! how sick poor Winnie is!" And when Fremont hesitated as to his proper course she almost flared up at him. "Why don't you go to her!" she asked in astonishment. "She's asking for you all the time!"

Winnie lay in bed; and when Fremont entered she stretched her hands out to him with a queer little smile, and drew him to her with a moan.

"I'm scared, Fremont!" she wailed. "I'm scared! I want you with me every minute!"

He was thankful that his mother was there in place of Mrs. Absalom Frost, who would have unceremoniously ejected him from the room in the name of all the proprieties at once, as no place for a man and Mrs. Absalom Frost at the same time. Kate McConkey came in much sooner than any one but the impatient Fremont might have expected, with such an air of calm and confidence that both Winifred and Fremont took from her a momentary quietude of spirit. Fremont was holding Winnie's hand.

"Oh, she's having an awful time," said Fremont. "Why doesn't Doc Bliven come? Isn't he ever coming?"

"No," said Kate, "she hain't havin' a bad time at all—yet. Doc is out to a case in the country. We met him on the road. He'll be here all right. He couldn't do anything now if he was here. Poor, poor little girl!"

His mother's calmness gave the boy periods of cessation from his anxiety; but the recurring paroxysms of maternity wrung his heart and struck him with recurrent panic. The wan, quivering smile which Winifred bestowed upon him after each of these periods of moans and cries crucified him with pathos. He revolted against the decree of nature or of God which imposed these agonies on the mothers; and thought with indignation of a joke he had read in

a paper not long before which so lightly asserted that everything in this life is evened up, and that the pains of shaving, if totaled during a lifetime, equal those of motherhood. He would like to wring that writer's neck! And was it a just God who had condemned Adam to a contention with thistles and sterility in the soil only, but had sentenced Eve to this sorrow in bringing forth? Then the hand which clasped his tightened with a convulsive pressure, the moans began, repressed by shut lips and clenched teeth; and at last broke all bounds and came forth unrepressed.

Doctor Bliven, after an eternity of waiting, came in acting exactly as if nobody were in pain or danger, laughed in his ordinary manner, joked with Winifred and went away, saying that he would look in a little later. Fremont followed him out into the hall.

"Do you think she'll live?" he asked.

"Live?" echoed the doctor. "Live! You'll be darned lucky if she don't outlive you. She's all right—she's all right, my boy. Making fine progress. Perfectly normal, perfectly normal. First child, you know—first child. Likely to be a little harder. Preparin' the way for the other little fellers. Both of you get used to it after a time or two. Look in a little later. Don't worry—perfectly normal."

Catherine had come in and heard this. She was pale and anxious, and clasped Fremont's hand to comfort him. He looked at her and thought of that text about things being evened up in this world. He knew that the neighbors had always thought Catherine the mainstay of the family, as no doubt she was, but here was Winifred, who was criticized for letting Catherine do everything for her as she did when they were little girls, and Catherine, with her strong and really magnificent form, and her greater ability to endure, was getting off with just the housework, and the manage-

ment of the family! It was not right! But he caught a yearning in the older sister's expression which made him ashamed of this feeling. That face was beautiful in its selflessness. He knew that if she could, Catherine would have borne all this pain to save her little Winifred, who had never before had any sorrow a part of which she could not lay on the strong shoulders of her sister, or weep away in her arms. And then the moans of his wife, rising to a higher key, took him back to the bedside, and to the quivering hand stretched out for him.

Now, he was sure, Winifred was dying! He looked up in his mother's face and found reassurance there—which reassured him for a moment only. It seemed as if he must do something; to sit there idle, holding Winifred's hand was unbearable. Then the moans became less heartrending and frequent; and presently there came, like a glint of sun out of the clouds, that pathetic smile. He had thought and written of heroines, but here in his tender little Winifred was a heroism of which he had never dreamed. He bent his head and kissed her hand over and over again.

If Fremont had been burning at the stake, he would have speculated on the union of the chemical elements in the wood and the atmosphere to cause flame, or on the various ways in which the roasting of flesh for food originated. He had that sort of mind. And now, between the horrible crises which increased in number and agony, he sat so pale and drawn that—I say it to her shame—his mother was sorrier for him than she was for Winnie, over whom she yearned in pity—he was still carrying on a course of reason on this mystery of the pains of parturition. What was the good of it in nature? Why did all female animals suffer from it almost in direct proportion to their approach to humanity as the culmination of the evolutionary process?

You see he had read some of his Herbert Spencer and

that not without some benefit or damage, according to the point of view.

What was the good of this to the organism—this pain and agony? How did it tend to the perpetuation of the race? He could not remember to have read anything that threw any light whatever on it. It must be of some good, or poor Winnie would not be condemned to lie there white and quivering, awaiting another wrench of nature's rack and thumbscrews. And as he thought it seemed to him that he could see a utility in it for the human race. That "equilibrium of births and deaths" of which Spencer wrote, as the only salvation of the race against the tendency to multiply to the limit of subsistence—which Malthus pointed out—a tendency which was to be relieved only by war, or pestilence, or famine, or all three; why, what was more conducive to the reduction of the birth-rate than such torture as this which mothers were obliged to undergo? God—he was becoming a Baptist again—said unto the woman: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children." He condemned them to toil and the subjugation of the weeds and blight and rust, so that they might become civilized and peaceful. And then it became necessary that their children be trained and educated—for it was not in physical sorrow alone that the conception of the modern woman was multiplied. The savage woman bore her child until it saw daylight, and then it shifted for itself very soon. The civilized woman did the same thing, brought it forth in pain and danger to which the savage woman was a stranger, and then bore it on for years through all the stages of development which are demanded by civilization. God was multiplying the troubles of her conception age by age. And still she had these agonies of parturition, also increasing age by age as civilization turned her more and more into something physically less perfect for multiplication than the mere animal she

once was, but higher and higher in her exaltation above animalhood. Why, it was perfectly clear why Evolution—he now vibrated back to Spencer—had not only not removed, but had intensified these pains. It was the thing—perhaps the chief thing—which would as Progress bestowed more intelligence and foresight on Man—and Woman—tend to bring to an end that evolutionary preponderance of births over deaths. It would bring about an equilibrium. Population would become stationary. The Riddle of the Sphinx would be solved.

And now a startling thought came to him. It was only in Man that this check on population could work. And it was only in Man's affairs that it was needed—so far as Man is concerned. It is the crowning achievement of humanity, thought the heterodox Fremont, who must be pardoned if possible, because of the trouble he was in—it is the crowning achievement of humanity that it alone can overcome the primal curse of the race, that tendency to spawn until it slays or sickens or starves. Why, then, do we find the animals suffering as Winnie suffers, in diminishing agony all down the line, to the point where the multiplication is accomplished painlessly (there he made a gratuitous assumption) by fission or budding? Why, it must be because of what Tennyson calls that unceasing purpose which through all the ages runs. It must be because God (you see Fremont vibrated between materialism and something else, just as humanity vibrates)—because God intended all the time to make man the heir of evolution, so that the earth and the fulness thereof might be enjoyed by him in peace and plenty, forever and forever!

He has never lost this vision in all the years that have followed. It became his economic creed, and his religion. It marked for him a sociological conversion. And he was always afterward finding this equilibrium of births and deaths, not as a thing to come, as Spencer taught, in the

remote future, but as a thing established now, just in proportion to the civilization which any people, or any part of a people, have acquired; and therein he found the inspiration for his contention that economic justice and general realization of all the benefits of culture must be realized by all the people, high and low, as essential, not only to their spiritual and material lives, but as the only means whereby the world may be saved from death in animal fecundity. You must remember that he never had the benefits of a university course in sociology. And soon the greatening and intensifying crisis in the room put a stop to all this theorizing.

Doctor Bliven came back. Mrs. McConkey had been clearly under increasing stress of anxiety—she thought he came back none too soon. Fremont felt a desperation growing in him at his inability to do anything. Surely something could be done—for nobody could live long through what Winnie was suffering!

"I'm glad you've come," said Fremont's mother. "It's getting to be a hurrying time of year here!"

It was! The house buzzed with agitation. Catherine came and went like a shadow. Fremont heard her voice and May's outside the door in hushed, hurried tones. The moans grew to shrieks. Something like unconsciousness must have fallen upon Fremont, as he clung to Winifred's hand. And finally, Doctor Bliven laughed a little and remarked: "It's a girl!" Fremont did not look at the little red creature. Mrs. McConkey drew a long breath of relief. Presently the hand he had held all through the ordeal relaxed, and Winifred slept.

"You'd better take a little rest," said his mother to Fremont.

He went out into the parlor and lay down on a couch—or staggered to it; and Catherine found him there in such a state that she hurriedly called Doctor Bliven to his side.

"He's always been subject to these spells," said his mother. "When he's under any great strain, he'll kind of cave in after the thing's over. Maybe you can give him something."

The doctor was apparently startled at Fremont's collapse; but after he had "given him something," and the boy shamefacedly sat up, the doctor laughed at him uproariously.

"Joke on you, Freem," said he. "You're strong enough to stand the pangs of childbirth, I should think. Never saw a young mother come through in better shape than Winnie's done; and as for the baby, it's a rip-snorter. As fine a girl as ever I officiated over. An' now, Gran'ma McConkey, I'll turn the case over to you. I'll be around in the morning. An' if this young man has any severe after-pains, call me! Ha, ha, ha!"

Fremont hoped the fellows around the court-house wouldn't find out about his collapse. He was all right, now; and went in and sat by Winnie for a few minutes, and at his mother's suggestion lay down again on the sofa. Catherine and May both came and talked over the great event in quiet happiness. May's great dark eyes shone with excitement. Catherine was concerned about the feeding of the child, which seemed to her an immediate necessity, until corrected by Mrs. McConkey. Winifred had already selected a name in case it should be a girl. It was to be Lorena, after the lady in the old song which began, "The years sweep slowly by, Lorena." If it had been a boy, it was to have been Fernando. Fremont was surprised that after Winifred awoke he was not called at once to her bedside; but Mrs. McConkey insisted that she be left alone for a while.

Hours afterward Mrs. McConkey came to Fremont, saying that Winifred was asleep again, and that she had something to say to her boy.

"Winnie," said she, "says she won't—that is, she don't want to suckle her baby."

"Has she food for it?" asked Fremont.

"I guess she'll have enough," said Mrs. McConkey, "but she don't want to nurse it."

"I wonder why," said Fremont.

"She seems to think," said Mrs. McConkey, "that she won't be as nice form if she does; an' of course, that's so. I told her that the best food for a baby is its mother's milk; but she won't hear of it. I don't know quite what to do."

There was in Mrs. McConkey's voice and manner a little severity, an effect of chill toward Winifred; something that lasted for some time, and perhaps never quite vanished. She could not understand her daughter-in-law, as Fremont did. He shrank from any persuasion of the dear girl. He thought he knew the secret of her attitude—devotion to him, desire to be a girl to him always; and she was so weak, so prostrated. And he foresaw that she would hold to her position fiercely—as she did—and thus created a rather hard situation for Cathie, to whom the babies were turned over, with all the other practical affairs of the house. Lorena clung to her skirts, and she talked the strange language of babyhood to the child and held her in her arms, and looked down into her eyes closing in sleep with all the fervor of maternity, quite as much as did her own mother—perhaps more.

"I'll have little Brindle brought in," said Mrs. McConkey; "she's Old Cherry's heifer, you know, and gives the nicest milk, and she's just new-milks. I hope the baby will do well on her milk—she's such a healthy baby now!"

CHAPTER IV

THE GRANGER BARD

MR. DICK McGILL went hurriedly into the office of the clerk of the courts, and looked about as if searching for some one. Owen Gowdy was writing in a huge book. N. V. Creede stood outside the high counter idly watching Captain Ashe who was going in and out of the big vault, occasionally coming out with papers.

"There never was any such case filed in this office!" he said defiantly looking in Mr. Creede's eye.

"Guess again, Cap," answered the lawyer. "If there wasn't any such a case, why was it on the trial docket term before last? Look here," showing a bar docket.

"I remember now," said the captain, taking new ground. "You got them papers yourself a month or two ago. You'll find 'em in your office, N. V."

"Where's my receipt for 'em then?" interrogated the attorney. "Where's the Neatherd? He'll find 'em."

"Oh, Freem!" shouted the captain.

Fremont emerged from a back office with a pen over his ear and an inquiring look on his face.

"I want the papers in Williams vs. Peterson, Freem," said N. V. "I'm submitting a motion to Judge Foster in chambers, trying to get it at issue for next term. The captain can't find 'em."

"What's the number?" asked Fremont, and on getting the information went into the vault and emerged with the

documents. "Here, don't go away without signing this receipt," he demanded.

"Where'd you find the papers?" queried the captain, rather testily.

"Right where they belonged," said Fremont.

"Mistake to put 'em there," objected Mr. Creede. "Never would have been found where they belonged if Freem hadn't ruined this office with system. Always used to find everything that was lost when we swept out the office. Seen the judge go up yet?"

Mr. Creede went out without any exchange of civilities, save a nod, with Mr. McGill, the editor of the *Monterey Journal*. McGill seemed far from inconsolable at this coolness on the part of our great lawyer. In fact, he smiled serenely. There were two sorts of people in Monterey as he classified them, those who were against him because he had harpooned them in his paper recently, and those who were for him because they were afraid he might do so in the next issue. Mr. Creede this morning belonged to the first class. McGill followed Fremont into the back office and closed the door after him.

"When some great newspaper takes you away to be its star special writer," said he to Fremont, "Cap Ashe'll go crazy. You seem the only one that knows where anything is."

"The captain's abilities lie in other directions than office details," replied Fremont. "But by the time you mention, Owen will have everything down pat, if old age hasn't robbed him of his eyesight and other faculties."

"I want you to write me a piece," said Dick. "We've got to go after this new Farmers' Alliance Movement. It's a lot like the old Anti-Monopoly move, and the old line elevators will be put to a lot of trouble to kill 'em off. Your old friend Magnus Thorkelson is president of it. Can't you

do something with him through his stepson out here in the front office?"

"No," said Fremont. "He didn't ask for the place for Owen, and nobody can move him if he gets his Norwegian head set and thinks he's right. What do you care about the elevator matter anyhow?"

"Nothing," replied Dick. "Only if you give 'em an inch they'll take an ell, and what'll become of the party management? I agree with Judge Hubbard. Hear what he said last state convention, when he and his group of managers had selected all the nominees but that of state superintendent of schools? Bill Blythe said, 'Well, if none of us has a man for that place, why not let the dear people nominate state superintendent?' 'No, by George!' said Hubbard. 'Let 'em get started once nominating the people's choices, an' nobody knows where it'll end. Let 'em have state superintendent, and one of these days, they'll take the governor and even the supreme judges away from us railroad men. No, we must find a good man for state superintendent, and give him to the people!' An' they did."

"I suppose you were right there and heard that?" said Fremont.

"The *Journal's* an all-seeing eye!" said Dick. "But we mustn't let these farmers go around hollering 'Ring!' without getting back at 'em."

"That's true," said Fremont, who was identified with the "Ring" but did not believe McGill's cynical tales. "What do you want me to write?"

"Give me some verses for the front page of the next issue," said he. "We'll sign it 'Granger Bard'; and you can make it the protest of one of the unorganized farmers against the would-be leaders of the farmers' revolt. Can't you work in what Dunc McAlpine said when Walter Byington asked him if he was a member of the Farmers' Alliance?"

"What did Dunc say to him?" asked Fremont, smiling at the suggestion of the conservative Scotch farmer's acrid humor turned against the office-seeking Walter Byington.

"He said, 'No, Mr. Byington, Aw'm not a member of the Farmers' Alliance; but I have all the qualifications for membership, sir!' "

" 'What do you regard as the qualifications for membership in the Farmers' Alliance?' Walter shot back, kind o' brussling up to him. 'I'd like to know, sir?' "

" 'Aw've run for county office an' got beat!' says Dunc—an' you ought to've heard the fellers yell! Can't you work that into our poem? Nothing turns one farmer away from the fellows that are trying to organize 'em like a suspicion that they're seeking office."

"But I don't believe that Mr. Thorkelson is," said Fremont.

"He'd like to go to the Legislature," said Dick in a whisper.

"And he'd be a good man for it," replied Fremont.

"My God, boy! Don't let yourself be caught saying things like that where they'll be overheard. The outsider in our game is the outsider. An' maybe I'm wrong about his ambitions. Will you write those verses or not?"

"I'll try," said Fremont. "And if the muse won't mew, I'll give you a prose fantasia or something."

"Save space for it," said Dick, picking up his hat. "You won't fail. You never do."

Mr. McGill was an important citizen; but he was conscious of the fact that he was not so important in the new community as he had been in years gone by, in the old. He belonged to the old generation of pioneer newspapermen. He had hauled his little old Washington hand press and the paraphernalia that went with it across the prairie from Dubuque before the railroad had crossed the river. He had a profitable printing business. He was even print-

ing the time cards for the railways. He had a substantial business in blank books manufactured in Monterey which he had established when so many new counties were set up all at once, by the Legislature at a time when many of them were almost without population. It was the Golden Age of easy money in Iowa for such men as Dick McGill, a time of beginnings. Now it seemed almost at an end.

He was what we used to call a "personal" editor, with a satanic talent for personalities; which he used to make his paper a household institution when there were fewer households. Women said the sheet wasn't fit to enter a decent home, because of Dick's rather pronounced taste for the broad in humor and satire—but their husbands said that they could not get hold of the *Journal* until their wives had read it. There had recently been a fight in the street between Mr. McGill and Henderson L. Burns, who had accepted the secretaryship of the new Citizens' Committee which was opposing the County Ring. Burns, who was Scotch, and quick of temper, was exasperated to the extent of making a physical attack on Dick McGill, because the *Journal* had adopted the style of referring to Mr. Burns frequently as "County Superintendent, h——l burns." It lacked in respect, Mr. Burns thought, and Mr. N. V. Creede, though he laughed about it, was not quite free from annoyance because, after he had addressed the meeting called to organize the Citizens' Committee, he was thereafter referred to as "Nux Vomica Creede," just because his initials were "N. V." He would rather have been some other drug.

As for Holbrook, who was made the attorney for the committee and had filled the columns of the *Times,* the new rival of the *Journal,* with criticisms of county contracts, Dick never called him anything but "Lawyer Holdback." Because, it was implied rather irresistibly, the Citizens' Committee, for the sake of saving themselves taxes

levied on them for the public good, were holding back progress.

But Dick, a wizened little man with a straggly beard, who had a general air of harmlessness, and was in fact one of the most amiable men on earth, felt himself surrounded by difficulties as Monterey grew from a clump of houses to a substantial town. There were too many new people. The new people were of a new class. The old residents were changing, too. Civilization was overtaking him. The *Times* which was against everything the *Journal* was for, had on its staff a finely educated Englishman who, in a state of alcoholism, had been kicked off a freight train one day, and been taken up by the new paper as its local editor, and who, during his periods of sobriety, wielded so skilful a pen that even Dick's old admirers admitted that he certainly did put it over on Dick McGill once in a while. Now, too, it had been necessary to change his old weekly over into a daily in order that some one else might not come in and take the field away from him. Dick was from long habit mentally a weekly, and not a daily. His growing printing business and trade in legal blanks and blank books were profitable, but burdensome. He had found out that Fremont McConkey could write almost anything, and after a year or so of practise, could write it promptly, and, Dick thought, even better than the *Times* mercenary, Ethelbert Braithwaite—or "Little Ethel" as he was named according to the style of the *Journal*. This because of the fact that he weighed some twenty stone, as he admitted; which was worked out by local mathematicians as two hundred and eighty pounds.

For while "Little Ethel" could write a most swingeing thing when sober, it was ever too scholarly and ponderous for the local taste. Fremont could skate rings around him when he happened to be feeling right.

As a member of the county organization it was his

duty, as he saw it, to help form public opinion and to fight the organization's enemies. I beg you to believe that when the Citizens' Committee made its final revelations, nobody was more surprised than Fremont McConkey; and was as deeply ashamed of his past activities as his worst enemy could have desired. Please remember, too, how easy it was for a dreamer like Fremont, all inexperienced as he was when he came in from the back townships, to believe in his friends and associates as against Paul "Holdback," "Nux Vomica" Creede and "h——l burns." That is why Dick McGill had come to depend upon him so much to help out; and why Fremont had his poem ready for the next issue of the *Journal*. Shall I insert this doggerel? I believe I will; for it is a part of the evidence in the case of "Things in General vs. Fremont McConkey." Here it is:

CHESTNUT BELLS

BY "THE GRANGER BARD"

"Hear the jingle of the bells,
Chestnut bells!
As from country hillsides down,
From all quarters of the town,
From all places where the *Times*
Brings its little strings of rhymes
Forth it wells!
And the editor who sits
Working hard his feeble wits,
(Sad to tell!)
Hears the tinkle, tinkle, tinkle of the many, many bells
And his great big bloated body bigger yet with joy outswells;
For he thinks because his readers
Smile and snicker o'er his leaders,
That they're smart!
And his heart
Given by vanity a start
Flutters round in great commotion, as with all his little art,

Out he shoves more moldy chestnuts on the journalistic mart!
Crying 'Ring, ring, ring!'
In hopes to cause a sting.
To his betters who for long, long years have seen through the whole thing!
But he hopes to stir up faction
By this funny, silly action!
In he sails!
How he sets the welkin ringing with his jeers and groans and wails!
But he fails!
Oh, he fails!
You bet! he always fails!
Just as sure's election morning comes with equinoctial gales:
But because
He must pause
In his ardor for the cause (?)
Unless he keeps up his old cry, though now worn thin as gauze;
He tunes the same old 'organ' to the same old cry of 'RING'!
And the people, when they see that 'tis the same old rotten thing,
Ring the bells,
Chestnut bells,
And he thinks from out the dells,
One universal chorus of applause it is which swells!
And his shrieks and groans and yells
Rise mingling with the jingling and the tinkling of the bells!
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells, bells, bells, bells!
The jingling of the tinkling chestnut bells!"

Who remembers the time when we who were exquisite satirists and wits, hung little bells under the lapels of our coats and exterminated the perpetrator of an old joke by ringing it? Do I see a hand? I do, there back of the easel. Well, you and I are getting old, my dear. The children seem to be quite in the dark, concerning the episode of the

chestnut bells as a phase in the development of our delicate American wit. To them and the historian let it be explained that the contest led by Paul Holbrook against the County Ring and the period when Fremont McConkey was winning his great fame as a writer, coincided with the vogue of the chestnut bells. The verses establish that fact. They show, too, how really acute was the contest in which our boy was engaging.

What an artistic fall from the ambitions of the era of Carlos the Terrible! Ethelbert Braithwaite was a good sport and enjoyed it hugely; for of course there was only one person in Monterey who could have done the pieces of "The Granger Bard" and the prose articles. He met Fremont as he was going home with May, who had called for him at the office to tell him to buy some meat for supper, and as Ethelbert had drowned some of his British impassivity in what by sense of smell was plainly gin, he slapped Fremont on the back and solemnly congratulated him on his *magnum opus*.

"But I'll tell you, my young friend," he said in deep gravity, "there ought to be some law restraining the might of that brawny right hand of yours. My friend, Leigh Hunt once wrote concerning lions that 'a wind went on their paws.' It's the same with you, my boy. I ought to be able to obtain a decree of court enjoining you from striking me with your right hand. God knows the left is mighty enough!"

CHAPTER V

UNEXPECTED LIGHT

MR. N. V. CREEDE, going home to supper, saw the tall form of Fremont McConkey moving on before him. It was very soon after the appearance of the satiric verses on the bells. He quickened his pace and fell into step with the young man from Willow Township.

"How's the 'Granger Bard' this afternoon?" he asked.

"Hope he's well," answered Fremont. "He writes pretty poor verses, though."

"Modesty is a virtue if it isn't carried too far," said N. V. "The ability to wield a facile pen is an asset to a young man. Those verses were not so bad as you imply. Fugitive stuff, of course; but nothing in 'em to require their author should become a fugitive. They're worth while to turn opinion against the political revolt that's worrying so many."

"What do you think of it?" asked Fremont.

"The revolt?"

"The whole situation."

"Oh, it's temporary," said the lawyer. "The farmers are too scattered to accept leadership, and they have no capable leaders, and they follow the wrong ones when they emerge from the ruck. Jim Weaver, for instance, and Calamity Weller, and Gillette. Blatherskites! The great corporation interests are going to run the country. Locally, the Anti-Horse-Thief Association has more strength to-

day than the Farmers' Alliance, because a stolen horse is a concrete grievance, while the money power is too vague—if there is any such thing. Now in a town it's different. This Citizens' Committee of Paul Holbrook's may do business with you fellows in the court-house; but the Farmers' Alliance—it comes like water, and like wind it goes."

They walked along in silence for a space. Then Mr. Creede spoke of what was in his mind when he brought this conversation about.

"I sort of wonder," said he, "that Magnus Thorkelson is getting into the fight against the party management so strong. He's the whole thing in that new Farmers' Elevator movement that the railways are going to kill off in due time, or the Grain Exchange in Chicago. I thought after he got Owen Gowdy into office that he'd be loyal."

"He hadn't anything to do with Owen's coming in," replied Fremont.

"Who did then, you?"

"No," replied Fremont. "I helped; but the prime mover in it was Mr. Buckner Gowdy."

"The boy's father!" There was something like an "I thought so!" in Mr. Creede's exclamation. "Whom did Gowdy talk to first about it?"

"So far as I know," answered Fremont, "he took it up with me. We were getting awfully behind with our work and I was working nights. He came in one evening, and urged the appointment of Owen. Then Raws Upright came in with him and fixed it with the captain. I don't believe either Owen or Mr. Thorkelson knew about it. But it was a great relief to me."

"Must have been," said Mr. Creede. "Must have been! Did he say anything—Gowdy, I mean—about Owen's being his son—or give any such reason as fatherly solicitude, you know?"

"Not to me," said Fremont. "He might have gone into

that with Upright. I heard him say to the captain that it would keep the Gowdy name from being a byword at every dance, or something like that."

"Did he?" queried Mr. Creede. "Could you recall the exact words he used?"

"I think I could," answered Fremont.

They walked along again in silence. Then Mr. Creede suggested that it looked like a storm. They came to the corner where their ways separated.

"Have you ever thought," asked Mr. Creede, "of what you shall do when you are through with this county work? It's not a thing for an able young man like you to depend upon. I suppose you have?"

Fremont almost reeled. The question struck him like a blow. He recalled his determination to go to college—and the sweet crisis which swept that dream into the past forever. A sense of desolation overcame him as he suddenly realized that for all these months he had lived in the present only; he had given up his dreams one by one, and had dwelt in one thing only, his wife, her love, and their companionship.

"I—I," he stammered. "I used to have dreams and plans—but I'm afraid I have given them up!"

"Ever think of becoming a lawyer?" asked Creede.

"I've thought of every profession under the sun," answered Fremont, with a nervous laugh in which Mr. Creede joined.

"I know how it is," said he. "I've been a boy myself! But do you know that under our law, after you have been in the clerk's office for two years, if you can pass the examination at Des Moines, you can be admitted to the bar?"

"No," said Fremont.

"I suppose you and Owen Gowdy are pretty close," said N. V. interrogatively.

"He hasn't made many close friends," said Fremont, his mind turning to the issue in the McConkey family as to whether or not Owen might pay attentions to Sarah, "and I guess I'm as close to him as any man in the county."

"If you'd like to take up the study of law," said N. V., "my office and library are open to you. This is going to be a better place to practise law in a few years than we have for a long time dared to hope. You ought to be a good lawyer, too, when you get past this running off after newspaper notoriety and politics, and remember that as Blackstone says, 'The law is a jealous mistress.' It's all right to do these things now—gives you acquaintance, you know; but when you really tackle the law, it crowds everything else out. Think of it. I'd like to be of use to you in establishing you in the profession, and being in the clerk's office in your present capacity gives you a training that, wisely or unwisely, the law accepts as legal training—provided you pass the Supreme Court examinations."

"It's taken as equivalent to going to college?" asked Fremont.

"Yes," answered Mr. Creede. "And to tell the truth, it's about as good as some colleges. I studied in an office in Indiana myself. And you're pretty well equipped in that literary exterior that is looked for."

"It seems to be a way out of the hole I find myself in," said Fremont. "I'll think it over. I think I will accept. And I thank you ever so much, Mr. Creede!"

"Oh, that's all right," answered he. "You'll be useful in keeping the office in order, sweeping out in the morning and the like—though I shall remember that you've a salary to earn outside. And by the way, if Owen would like to come in with you, why, let him come. It might be better for both of you as students to work together."

It seemed to Fremont as he walked toward his home that this newly-discovered opportunity shone out as a great light.

He could become a lawyer. He had already some reputation for ability—he knew that—and what was better still for a lawyer, he had now a rather wide and growing acquaintance among all classes. He believed he could build up a practise. He saw that he would be in a position far better than would a young law student coming into the town with a diploma from even the best of law schools, but a stranger. It would all depend on his skill and ability. And it seemed as if it would be a delight to him to begin reading again. He felt that his mind was lying fallow, and would respond to culture like a laid-by field.

Afterward, he pondered at times over the question of why Mr. Creede had suddenly proposed this association to him. Did he think that Fremont might be eligible as a junior partner when he should be admitted to the bar? That would be a complete settlement of the problem of his future; for Mr. Creede was now the leader of the local bar, and was the attorney of one of the railways, an associate on almost equal terms of the little group who really managed the governmental affairs of the state through their control of political parties—Hubbard, Duncombe, Blythe, Cook and Withrow. This was dazzling, but it was almost too good to be true. Perhaps N. V. merely wanted to try him out—him and Owen Gowdy.

But why Owen? Owen seemed to have no elements of promise as a lawyer. He had a common-school education as Fremont had, but he was no student. No student of anything but music, which he had learned in the beginning of Magnus Thorkelson who was proud of the fact that he had taken ten lessons of Ole Bull back in Norway, and insisted that what he called his "position"—the manner of holding his left hand when playing—he got from that great master. Then why Mr. Creede's interest in this young fiddler? Fremont was becoming somewhat skilled in detecting the undercurrents of purpose in the behavior

of men. Local politics had taught him to probe below the surface. He remembered that the astute lawyer had broken off the thread of his discourse on the opportunity for Fremont in the law, to ask whether or not he and Owen were not pretty close; and he remembered also that the facts as to the influences which had brought about the elevation of Gowdy to his present place had really been wormed out of Fremont before the study of the law had been suggested. Mr. Creede had been advised that the boy's putative father, Mr. Buckner Gowdy, the one man in the county who was called a millionaire, had been the prime mover in it. Why had Mr. Creede been so curious as to whether or not the elder Gowdy had spoken of Owen as his son to Fremont, or to the captain, or to Roswell Upright? If Fremont had known the law as he now hoped to do in the future, the question might not have been so puzzling. He finally disposed of the matter as a case of mixed motives. N. V. Creede probably thought that Fremont might be of use to him in various ways; possibly, the idea of some sort of partnership, if Fremont proved worthy of it, was in the recesses of his secretive mind; and if Buckner Gowdy were becoming interested in his old age in his only, though illegitimate son, the fact that the young man had been taken into the office of N. V. Creede would do no harm to the business of the office, and might be fruitful of good.

This conclusion subtracted something from the compliment to Fremont, but should he care? If he could lift himself out of the Slough of Despond in which he had felt himself sinking because of his abandonment of his dreams, it was enough. He reached home in a state of mind which was more like that of the old visionary days on the herding-ground, or in the hayfield, than anything he had enjoyed since he had grasped the hard and somewhat sordid realities of life in the Great World, as he had always thought it, and the Little World of Little Things as he had found it.

CHAPTER VI

A FAIRLY HAPPY FAMILY

INSTEAD of running to his young wife in joy with the great news of the new opening into one of the learned professions, Fremont shrank from telling it to Winifred. For one thing she was in a delicate state of health again. Little Fernando had bought his ticket from Anteland to Monterey very promptly after the arrival of the train of events which brought his sister Lorena to town. In fact it promised that the two arrivals might come within the same year, and in view of the fact that Lorena herself had brightened the home less than a twelve-month from the time when Bill Blake had, as he said, "took the gimp" out of the Blakes' best team on that trip to make these twain one, Mrs. McConkey was perhaps justified in saying that it was getting so that you couldn't hardly tell the difference between twins and some other young ones. But little Lorena's crib was a roomy one—which turned out a blessing.

Fremont was thankful afterward that he did not tell poor Winifred about the plan for taking the course in law; for it would have caused her tender heart many pangs. She demanded Fremont's company every moment when he was out of the office, and he was now buying paper-covered French novels to read to her, and was himself finding them much more interesting than those of Mrs. Holmes. This qualification must be made of the statement that he had been reading nothing since his marriage; but it is true that

he felt himself sinking mentally. But he could not sit all through the long evenings simply talking to Winifred. So he read what he termed "trash" to her. It was from one of these Gallic books that Winnie had imbibed the notion of not nourishing her infant in the old-fashioned way, thus bringing on herself that contemptible storm of criticism among the women of her circle, the memory of which enrages Fremont to this day, and which had made her so unhappy. She should not have been subjected to it in her condition. It was cruel, and Fremont has never forgotten her hurt expression when the fact came to her ears, as it was sure to do in that little society, that she was so vain and uppish that she was willing to let her baby run the risk of dying on substitute foods rather than give it what God had furnished for it; and that she had that softy of a husband under her thumb so that he daren't stir from her side for fear he'd see some other woman, when she ought to remember that being in politics as he was, he ought to be out with other men every chance he got, to make friends and build up influence. It was so false, said Winifred! She wanted him because she just had to have him; and after Cathie had found out what agreed with the baby, see how fat and rosy she was!

Fremont knew that whenever he took her into his confidence about going to the Creede law office early in the morning, sweeping it out and dusting it, reading an hour or two, and going back after supper for another session with the law, it would mean tears and a struggle against Winifred's demands upon him. As I have said, he was sorrowfully glad afterward that he spared her the ordeal.

You must not think that he was unhappy in his marriage. As he looks back upon it now, those first two years seem to him a very blissful period. He can see the Ashe family circle in the summer of 1880, just before the end of Captain Ashe's first term when he was due to be re-

nominated without opposition, as a matter of tradition. They are gathered in the sitting-room, the doors and windows all open to let the warm breeze sweep through. Winifred sits looking at little Lorena, who lies sleeping in that roomy crib; for she loves her baby dearly. Catherine has imbibed certain rules about baby-feeding which she insists on following, and presently puts down her book and smilingly interrupts Winifred's communion with Lorena, who has now awakened, and gives her her bottle. What a wonderful girl Catherine is! Fremont thinks this every day a dozen times a day, and remembers the original plan for the separate home for Winifred and himself as a wild experiment, the success of which he now sees to have been inconceivable. Catherine knew! One can see that she knows by merely looking into her calm hazel eyes, at that broad brow of hers with its thick brown hair, overshadowing a beautiful face filled with patience, resolution and wisdom.

Fremont sits on the sofa with May. Wilbur Smythe—"The little Smythe boy"—had come and gone, and felt like slaying Fremont for the privilege of sitting there with May and having little mock quarrels with her; for May is now the belle of Monterey. This evening her eyes look black, and so large and shining that Wilbur Smythe may be excused for dreaming of them. Wonderful eyes, red-brown in certain lights and shadows of sun or spirit, black in others; hair of midnight, and so heavy that the slender neck seemed bending under it; skin of creamy white; a little form which was a reduced facsimile of Hebe's, as could be noted in spite of the dress of that day—though I profess to know nothing of Hebe's form. May had never grown up. She was only five feet tall, but there was no man so hardy as to wish there were more of her. Perhaps Hebe was no larger. If so, that accounts for her popularity in Olympus, and may explain such inebriety as may have grown up there when she was cup-bearer.

Our Hebe and Fremont McConkey were chums. Their quarrels were mock ones. May brought all her troubles to him save the principal ones, those from Smythes and Holbrooks—for Wilbur, Junior, was persevering, in spite of the fact that May did not like short men; and Paul Holbrook had, after some attentions to Catherine, who refused to understand the point of them, transferred his allegiance to May. But May led the family in her hate of him for the persecutions of their friends in the court-house. Fremont hated Paul. Captain Ashe was bitter against him, now especially, since Paul had a corps of spies going over the books of all the county officers, even the captain's! Fremont, recognizing that these were public records, had dissuaded the captain from refusing to allow the examination, and from "kicking the spies out," as he once threatened to do; but Fremont handed over these records to the examiners of the committee with a coldness and hauteur which was new in the court-house; and he stood guard over the records in a manner which disclosed to them the fact that he believed them capable of altering the books or stealing them if their purposes required any such misdemeanor. So that ended the affair between May and Paul—or so every one believed.

It was rather an unusual thing when Captain Ashe spent an evening at home, but on the occasion we have in mind, he did not even go to the post-office after supper. He was a good deal changed by his new life. I think Catherine knew what had worked the alterations in him which were most apparent and most tragic; for any one, not too young to suspect or too ignorant to know the signs, could not have failed to see that he was drinking heavily and steadily. But inebriety alone could not account for all his mental disturbance. He seemed unable to follow what people said to him, or to keep in mind for more than a moment the subject of any conversation. It was a matter of jest in the

court-house, that he could not talk with any one unless he had in his hands some bit of paper which he carefully doubled and redoubled and folded until it was wadded up into the smallest possible compass, when he would throw it away, and unless he could find more paper, he became confused and lost. His banker, Mr. James Boyd, got great amusement for himself and his friends out of the fact that one day he attempted to talk with Captain Ashe on the street where there was no paper available, and the captain was "all up in the air" until he had run to a shade tree growing near by, and stripped from it a piece of bark which he could fold and refold while he talked. He looked at the thing in his hands instead of into the face of the person with whom he spoke. But little Lorena the baby was one with whom he could talk freely. To be sure, her part was confined to coos and goos and babblings, but the captain understood them all, and told her long stories of all sorts, moving his body slowly back and forth as he played with his little granddaughter in a way that spoiled her for other people's dandlings. He gave himself up to the baby tonight, but occasionally started at some sound and asked if there were not somebody at the door. Fremont knew, and on exchanging glances with Catherine he knew that she knew, that he was expecting some one.

"Let me get your slippers, father," said Catherine.

"No," said he, "I——"

"Oh, do let her!" urged Winifred. "Fremont does nothing but amuse himself with May, and I want amusement. Put on your slippers so you'll be comfy, and we'll play cribbage."

"All right," agreed the captain, "I'll go you. Anything to comfort a poor deserted wife."

Fremont reached over and pressed his wife's hand. He admitted his weakness in not being able to play at any game, especially her favorite one of cribbage. She gave

him one of her most loving smiles, and for an hour there came from her and her father a hum of fifteen-twos, fifteen-threes, and double runs. It was a cozy family circle. The baby slept angelically. May and Fremont were deep in some discussion of one of the studies she was carrying on; for May was threatened with strong-mindedness. Catherine had laid aside her book and was sewing—Winifred's affairs called for a deal of the seamstress's art. It was a fair sample of many, many evenings, the happiness of this one heightened by the captain's presence. And just as Winifred had won a game by an extraordinary series of fifteen-threes and double runs, the interruption came for which the captain's ears had waited; came through the ringing of the door-bell, an important innovation in Monterey, of which they were rather proud. The captain started to his feet, hastily saying that he would answer the bell; and they heard him greet his visitor, and take him into the parlor through that fatal door by which he had entered when the swan's nest among the reeds had been discovered.

A low rumble of muted talk came from the parlor. The family gathered in the sitting-room tried hard not to let silence occur which would seem like an effort to hear. It was not two minutes until Fremont knew who was his father-in-law's visitor; for Roswell Upright had a voice that had no brother—it carried like the baritone phase of the cylinder of a thrashing machine. What was he calling for? Fremont knew that Raws was supposed to be in financial difficulties, growing out of his grading contracts for the new railroad. People said that the old man had stubbed his toe when he came to deal with people who objected to easy profits. What Fremont did not suspect was that these difficulties had brought Mr. Upright to the captain that evening. A good deal of money had accumulated in the clerk's office, which would at some future time have to be accounted for, but, as he forcefully stated to the captain, what was the

use of having control of money if a friend couldn't be helped out of a temporary difficulty?

The captain demurred. He didn't want to draw this money out of Jim Boyd's bank, for Jim was on his, the captain's, official bond. He might get suspicious of the doings.

"I'll fix it with Jim," said Upright. "That don't need to stand in the way. Why, blast his eyes, I made him sheriff when he didn't have two dimes to rub against each other, and was shoein' horses and sharpening the lays of breakin' plows for a livin'!"

"Well," said the captain, "s'pose you can't make it? S'pose you can't pay it before I have to have it to show up with? Where'll I be then?"

Fragments of these words came through the partition. It was all unintelligible to Catherine and Winifred then, and to Fremont, too, for that matter; but he afterward recalled them, and in the light of events, understood them. When Upright went away, the captain returned to the family group and began pacing back and forth across the room. He refused to resume his cribbage game, and presently put on his boots and went out. Fremont heard him return late in the night—and marked his staggering steps and uncertain movements as he went to his room. There was something wrong, he felt sure. He sat by the window in his night-clothes wondering what it was, and trying to convince himself that he was foolish to foresee anything evil. The captain had been renominated. The Farmers' Alliance movement had fallen flat. Election was sure. The investigations of the Citizens' Committee would show nothing wrong with their office, he was positive of that!

CHAPTER VII

WINIFRED GOES WITH PAPA

HENRY McCONKEY was a rising young man in Vandemark Township. He had married the oldest Vandemark girl when the big Hell Slew was still called "Vandemark's Folly," but after Mr. Vandemark, his father-in-law, had so managed that the huge marsh was drained by the railway company as a *quid pro quo* for their right of way, the arable land had suddenly been increased from one hundred and twenty to eight hundred acres, and Henry had been induced to bring his family over to the broad levels of the new breaking, and take over his share of making it grow more corn per acre than any other land in Monterey County. Mrs. Vandemark, the aristocratic Kentucky lady to whom Jacobus Vandemark had commended himself, so the old settlers said, by whipping Buck Gowdy, her brother-in-law, and saving her from freezing in a big blizzard, was thought to be responsible for the alliance between the McConkey and Vandemark families; for she had boarded with Mrs. McConkey when she was a school-teacher before she was married, and not only thought Mrs. McConkey a wonderful woman, for the chance she had had, but she fell in love with Henry when he was a little chap.

Fremont's rise in the world was a marvel to the Vandemark family—that is, to all except J. T. Vandemark himself, who insisted that Fremont was the smartest boy in the county. As for Mrs. Vandemark and Henry himself, they

thought Freem smart enough, but mainly lucky. Henry came to town one day in the latter part of the summer to haul in a load of fat hogs and pay his taxes, and after exchanging jokes with Joe Zentz the treasurer, he went into the clerk's office to have a talk with his brother. They shook hands warmly; for not even the division of diverse destinies could lessen that natural brother-love, heightened by their long days together on the range and in the field. They walked out in the court-house yard and sat together on a bench under one of the hard-maple saplings. They talked of the new ground which Henry was working, and rejoiced over the fact that it was as rich as mud. Henry had been over in the Finster neighborhood buying young cattle, and marveled at the way the Germans had taken all that country since a handful of them followed Jurgen Lindermann into the county only a few years ago.

"There's dead loads of Dutch there," said Henry. "Don't look like the place where we herded cattle. Roads all run on section lines. And all the Yankees, as the Germans call us, are selling out and lettin' 'em have it. I guess they'll take the whole country in the end."

There was a silence here. Fremont knew that if he once began to repeat his thesis to Henry that the people who could make the best use of the land would finally get it, be they German or American, Henry would not admit it.

"Folks all well?" inquired Fremont.

"Pretty well," answered Henry. "How's yours?"

Not very well, Fremont was obliged to admit. Winnie was not only poorly, as was natural, but she was in poor spirits. Before, she had been so cheerful and so hopeful; but now she took a gloomy view of things. She had written down on a slip of paper what disposition she wanted made of her possessions when she died; and when Fremont tried to cheer her up, she admitted to him that she had a presentiment—but she would not say what she foresaw. She

wanted him to promise that he would always let Cathie be a mother to the baby, Lorena, and to little Fernando, of whom she spoke as if already *in esse,* and a member of the family *in præsenti.*

"Winnie talks a little strange sometimes," said Fremont. "And yet, Doctor Bliven says she is as well as can be. I wish I could have ma come over and stay a few days with her. It would do her good. If you're going over there, Henry, I wish you'd tell her I want her to come and stay a while with Winnie. Can't you drive over and tell her for me?"

"Why, yes, I can," said Henry, "and I'd be glad to; but why don't you send word over by Owen? He's over there every Sunday to see Sarah. They claim to be practising music, but they don't fool me. If I was her father and mother"—here Henry assumed a very improbable state of things—"I'd shut her in her room, before I'd let her lally-gag around playing accompaniments to sonatters and nocturnes and things with a come-by-chance, no matter if he has got a better job than some honest-born boys I could name!"

Here Henry's sense of the injustice inhering in Fremont's eminence in the world of those who were making an easy living, produced a seeming bitterness toward Owen, which was more apparent than real. He was really whipping Fremont over Owen's shoulders.

"He never said anything about it to me," said the surprised Fremont.

"Well," answered Henry, "that in itself looks kind of underhanded, don't it?"

"They're both of age," said Fremont. "They don't have to get my consent, or any one else's. If pa and ma and Sarah are willing, I don't believe you and I have much to say, have we? I'll send word over by him for ma to come. I'm worried about Winnie more'n anything else, just now."

Mrs. McConkey, after a two days' stay, went home after telling Fremont that, in her opinion, Winifred was all right in body; though it was not to be denied that her physical burdens were a little hard to bear.

"The trouble with her is," said she, "that she looks on the dark side of everything. I've been telling Catherine and May that more folks think themselves into the grave than are killed by bullets. Winnie's thinkin' needs straightenin' up. There's no spring to her mind. I'd almost think that some one she loved had been mean to her, if I didn't know better. I don't like it. Try to get her mind quieted, the poor lamb, an' I'll vouch for her comin' through it all right."

Fremont, May and Catherine held a conference on this, and agreed to make a great effort to get Winifred right in her spirits. In this they seemed to be moderately successful at first, but their complete success was prevented by the obvious progressive demoralization of Captain Ashe. For the first time, Winifred observed his lapses from sobriety, and aberrant behavior in many other respects. She was convinced that something evil impended in the captain's affairs; but her presentiment foreshadowed illness or death for her father; while Fremont, who was in spite of himself affected by Winifred's "notions," always thought of the troubles growing out of the clerk's office as the most probable stroke of Fate—and then laughed at himself for using that discredited old word, even in thought. But Winnie, whose smiles were very sad now, said often, "I feel that papa is going to get hurt, somehow. I want him to be very, very careful!"

The captain gradually developed a state of bitterness toward Jim Boyd, who was on his official bond, and who was the president of the Monterey State Bank, in which the clerk's account was kept. Another idea which was apparently fixed in his mind, in the sense in which the term "fixed

idea" is used in psychology, was that of the dominant power of Roswell Upright in county affairs.

"It looks, Freem," said the captain one day, "as if Jim Boyd, just because he's on my bond, means to tell me how to run this office. I'll show him one of these days that I'll do my banking where I please! The Exchange Bank of Lithopolis would like darned well to have our account; and some day you may see me take it over there, even if it is outside of the county-seat. Raws Upright says they'd make it an object to me. He's a director of the Lithopolis bank. There's a man that you've got to reckon with in this county, I tell you, in spite of his reckless talk. Why, he could send out the word that the regular ticket even this fall is to be knifed; and he could elect the Democrats!"

The captain was leaning over the desk in the clerk's office when saying this to Fremont, absorbedly folding a sheet of blotting paper over and over and into smaller and smaller compass. As he finished the speech he reached for another sheet, but seeing that the office was locked and that Owen had already gone for the day, he took his hat and overcoat and went out with Fremont, who, while he could not altogether agree with the captain as to Mr. Upright's present power, had learned that it was useless to take issue with him.

"If you're in politics in this county," Captain Ashe would repeat, "you've got to work with Raws, and work his way, I tell you!"

Politically, Fremont knew there was no possibility of any disaster for the captain in the rapidly approaching election; but the younger man knew the secrets of the county affairs, and was quite aware of the fact that there was a financial war waging between the Boyd forces and those which had for so long been dominant, those of the Holbrooks and Smythes. Back of every political power, even

in counties, there is usually a financial power. Mr. Boyd had been growing rich in exact ratio to the extent to which he had labored with the Upright machine in Monterey and Monterey County. His vaults contained great bundles of county and city warrants on which he was getting an illegally excessive rate of interest. And now, Fremont divined, there was a breach between him and Roswell Upright—and the captain was making the blunder of aligning himself with the financially-discredited boss, rather than with the man who had control of the credit. He was sure it was a blunder; but the captain would not listen when Fremont tried to tell him his views—Upright seemed to have him hypnotized. He was too hazy in his mental processes, too often fuddled with drink, and was so far lacking in the natural astuteness which a politician should possess, that he was unable to meet the issue and dominate it.

Fremont did not look for any crisis immediately. He never suspected that it was upon them, when one day the captain said that he was going over toward Lithopolis shooting geese. He had a goose-pit dug in a corn-field, he said, where he was sure to get some good shooting—a pit covered with corn stalks in which he could hide and wait for the great circling honkers, lured by decoys and baited by scattered grain. He drove a horse to a buggy; and after he had started, he came back to his office for his bank-book—a very unusual thing for a man going shooting.

Looking out of the window of his office in the courthouse, Fremont saw the captain drive to the Monterey State Bank, of which Mr. Boyd was president, hitch his horse, and enter the bank. He was there but a short time. He came out hurriedly, jumped into his buggy, and drove off rapidly toward Lithopolis, leaving Mr. Boyd, who had followed him out of the bank, standing on the sidewalk looking after him. This occurred immediately after the opening of the bank at

nine o'clock in the morning. Evidently, the captain had sacrificed the advantages of an early start in his shooting, for the purpose of visiting the banker.

He did not return that evening, but he was not expected; and before noon of the next day, neither Fremont nor any of the Ashe family had any thoughts to spare for any one but Winifred, whose labor had come prematurely upon her. Fremont went for Doctor Bliven, and learned that the doctor, in his official capacity as coroner, had been called into the country to hold an inquest. They concealed from Fremont the fact, if they knew it, that Captain Ashe had been found, shot dead, beside a wire fence enclosing the field in which his blind was situated. Doctor Bliven, as coroner, was seeking to ascertain whether the shooting was accidental or criminal.

Mr. Boyd reported to the authorities that Captain Ashe had drawn from the bank, just before setting out on his trip, a large sum of money—but did not disclose the fact that it was the full amount of the captain's deposit in the Monterey State Bank. If the shooting was accidental, the explanation offered by the facts was, that he had winged a bird which had made its way so far from the blind as to fall in the next field beyond the wire fence, and that the captain, in crawling over or under the fence, had accidentally discharged his gun, one barrel of which had been emptied, with fatal results. This was the theory of the accident—if it was an accident.

But the money which he had taken from the bank was not found on his person. The belief which was generally accepted when the body was found, that this was one of the accidents that so frequently happen when a hunter drags his gun after him through a wire fence, was abandoned when Mr. Boyd testified to the fact that Captain Ashe had left Monterey the morning before with this money in his possession. The word went over the county and state that

The word went over the county and state that the clerk of the courts had been murdered

the clerk of the courts of Monterey County had been murdered, and that the object of the assassination was robbery. The dead or wounded bird was found in the field adjoining the place of the captain's death. The dead man had been shot in the breast with a shotgun, and the shot were of the same size as those in the other barrel of his gun; but that was a fact of small significance; for few guns would have been found in Iowa that day unprovided with shot of that identical size. The fact that the tragedy occurred in a part of the county near the Bushyager neighborhood seemed of sinister import. The Anti-Horse-Thief Association met and considered. The doings of the Bushyagers on that day were investigated. The fact that all seemed to be accounted for at all times when Captain Ashe was engaged in his shooting was disappointing. It injured the case on which the leaders of the Association would have liked to act; and they were not convinced by the various alibis. All through the community the feeling grew up and hardened that something would have to be done about these bandits, unless the authorities showed themselves able to bring them to justice. The splendid qualities of Captain Ashe, the great loss which the community had sustained in his death, were subjects on every tongue. And in Monterey, the hearts of the people went out in sympathy to the afflicted household, from whom the dread news was withheld as long as possible for fear that the tragedy might be doubled. The doctor who had been called in as a substitute for Doctor Bliven let it be known that the captain's daughter, Mrs. McConkey, was at the point of death.

They called Fremont from her bedside for a few moments at last and told him of Captain Ashe's death. He showed no more than a passing interest in the matter. He was too full of agony for another and dearer. It was his friend, Charlie Fleming, the sheriff, who gave him the news.

"I want to ask you," said the sheriff, "whether you can

think of anything the captain might have done with that money."

"No—no—I—I can't," said Fremont. "I can't think of anything, Charlie. I guess my wife—is dying!"

"It's awful on you," said Charlie, "and on the whole family. He didn't say anything beforehand about taking that money out of Boyd's bank, did he?"

"Yes," said Fremont. "He said something about putting it in the Exchange Bank of Lithopolis. I must go, now!"

"Strange," said Fleming, "that he didn't make the change by a check. I'll telegraph over and see whether he went down and deposited it. Probably that's just what he did. I hope to hear good news from Winnie, Freem. Sorry to break in on you. But this is important, too."

The tiny little baby was a boy. Winnie had inquired about that in a voice so weak that they had to bend down to her lips to hear it.

"Little Fernando," said she. "Remember!"

"If I forget it," said Fremont, "you will be sure to remember. You can remind me."

She moved her head just the slightest bit as if trying to shake it, and gave him a ghostly hint of that old loving smile of hers, with which she had always rewarded him when their eyes met. Her eyes closed, and they thought her asleep for an hour or so—and then she was so utterly, utterly white that they thought of her as passed away. Fremont gently took her hand and felt for the pulse in the little wrist. It beat under his trembling fingers, but the pulsation was only a fluttering undulation in the life current. She seemed not to know that he was with her, but when he rose and walked across the room she opened her eyes and looked after him. When he came back to her, the fingers nearest him moved to invite him to take her hand in his; and when he did so she seemed really to slumber for a long while,

though her breath was so light and uncertain that the boy often grew cold as the fear rolled over his spirit that she was gone. She awakened, seemingly stronger.

"I'm going to nurse Fernando," said she—or at least the child's name and the word "nurse" Fremont heard clearly.

"I'm glad you'll be able to," he replied. "Now don't talk, darling, but save your strength."

"I've seen papa," said Winifred, when she next spoke. "He needs me to help him again. I think—if you can spare me a little, I'll go to papa."

Fremont could not reply. He kept his face turned from the light and pressed her hand gently. The tears ran down his cheeks, tear after tear, and his breast heaved spasmodically. He despised himself for his lack of self-control, for if his tears should fall on her hand it might give her a shock. Yet, when they did so fall, she only said: "Don't cry, darling, I'm all right!" with that shadow of a shade of a smile. Presently he felt that she wanted to speak to him again, and bent his ear to her mouth.

"I'm not going to be so silly any more," she murmured. "You can read all you please, dear!"

"All right!" was all he could say. "All right, dear! Now you must rest!"

The next time she showed him that she wished to speak to him, and he bent to listen, what she said required all the deep perception of loving sympathy to understand what she meant, and to know that her mind was not wandering.

"How good they were to me!" she whispered, "and me so silly! Those men at the thrashing!"

Fremont knew what she meant. He wondered whether or not he had quite understood that all the time this tender heart had been quivering under criticisms which it knew not how to avoid, so that the rude courtesy of the thrashing gang had dwelt in her heart all this time. He sat now with his ear close to her face, so that he might miss nothing;

but again for a while, he believed her to be asleep. Then she spoke more audibly.

"Tell Cathie and Lorena," said she, "that I'm going away with papa for a little while. By-by, darling!"

And then, as in the old poem, they who had believed her dying when she slept, thought her sleeping when she died.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FAIT ACCOMPLI

IF THE judgment of Mr. James E. Boyd, President of the Monterey State Bank, be accepted, the twin calamities which had fallen upon the Ashe family and upon Fremont McConkey was a wonderfully fine thing for Fremont. A little hard to lose a pretty young wife, leaving on his hands two motherless babes—a little hard, of course; but a wonderfully fine thing for all that. For Mr. Boyd, with all those county warrants in his bank, and fervently desiring that no new and untried person be installed in the office of the clerk of the courts; and moreover, recalling very distinctly that he had signed Captain Ashe's official bond, moved, before the double funeral was over, and without consulting any one but Roswell Upright, to have Fremont McConkey appointed to fill the vacancy, and to see that the name of Fremont McConkey be placed on the ticket by the Republican County Central Committee so that he might be elected to that desirable office in the place and stead of the deceased candidate.

"Destiny," said Mr. Boyd, "has kicked Fremont McConkey up-stairs! But we've got to have him, or a lot of the beans may be spilled!"

The thing was a *fait accompli* before he felt that it was proper to see Fremont and ask him to consent.

"The captain's affairs," said he to the mourning widower, "seem to be in some confusion. His memory needs a

friend in that office. I know that you would not for a moment allow any selfish interest of your own to prevent you from making good any irregularities into which he may have fallen and from protecting the good name of the grandfather of your children from the stigma of what the law calls crime."

"What crime?" asked Fremont. "He never meant to do anything wrong! What crime do you mean?"

"The crime of the defaulter," replied Mr. Boyd. "It can all be fixed up by making good what he—sort of—mislaid, you know. And as to what is coming to the county, Mr. Upright and I think the Board of Supervisors may be influenced—after a while—to sort of cancel—wipe the slate."

"No doubt of it!" exclaimed Raws heartily. "I'll go so fur as to promise it; but while we're pavin' the way to that—"

"In the meantime," said Mr. Boyd, "it will be essential for the protection of the captain's good name, and that of his family, to have some person devoted both to the public interest and to the Ashe family in his place in the courthouse. You would be the ideal person if we can swing the influence in your favor to secure your appointment to the vacancy caused by my old friend's death."

"How could I do any good there?" queried Fremont. "Our term ends in a few weeks."

"We think," said Mr. Boyd, "that we can bring influence to bear to get your name put on the ticket in the place of his, and elect you clerk. Some one has to have it. It would be a great thing for you, Fremont!"

Fremont looked out of the window as if he had not heard. Yet, he understood the importance of the matter to him—saw it in a second. He would have a means of supporting his babies, and Catherine, their almost mother, and May—four orphans.

"But what can I do if I am elected to correct anything wrong that father did?" persisted Fremont.

"Well," said Mr. Boyd, "I can think of many things. You can keep things from being stirred up, for one thing—for you'll be just running on in the old groove. And as Captain Ashe's bondsman—not that I admit the bond is valid at all—I could advance any shortages which may crop up, and you in the next two or four years, could reimburse me—sort of reimburse me, you know!"

"That might make a mere slave of me for two or four years," replied Fremont with a clearness of perception which rather surprised both his interviewers. "But I'll do it!"

Mr. Boyd breathed easier. It had looked for a moment, he said afterward, as if the fool were going to refuse. He then suggested to Mr. Upright, that if they were to succeed in landing this plum for Fremont, they had better start after it right then, and arose to depart. Fremont asked if Mr. Upright would not remain a moment, as he had something he wished to say to him. If Mr. Boyd had been utterly frank, he might have said that the appointment for Fremont, and his place on the ticket, having been already arranged for, Mr. Upright might stay all winter if he liked; but he only remarked on leaving that while there was no time like the present, an hour or so would probably make no difference.

"I only wanted to say to you," said Fremont, "that I found in his wallet, your note in favor of Captain Ashe for the amount of money he had with him when he went shooting."

"I was going to ask you about that," replied Raws. "I s'posed of course you had it. It would have made talk if it had been told of when he was found. This Citizens' Committee would have growed fat on that story—Raws Upright borrows all the clerk's funds! Clerk shoots himself! Glad you kep' it mum, Freem."

"I have only just found it," said Fremont. "It might have been completely lost. If I had known about that note when they were talking of mob law for Captain Ashe's suspected murderers, I would have made the thing public. He was not murdered. He was accidentally killed by his own shotgun."

"Glad you didn't find it any sooner," said Raws. "No such luck for me as your not findin' it at all, o' course; but see here, Freem, I can't pay that note right now, an' may have to have an extension or so. Why blurt out about it? It won't make it any easier for me to make a go of it for that debt to be public. There hain't goin' to be no mob now. An' if they was, nobody would be hung that ortn't to be on general principles. But the mob stage is over now till something else crops up. One of the things you're to be clerk fer is to give me time to turn myself on that note, with Boyd back of us to keep the dogs off. Least said, soonest mended! Why tip off our hand? Remember, this is politics, as well as money. It'll hurt the party if you tell any one but Jim Boyd. Tell *him,* of course. It's one of the assets for him. But it might defeat the ticket if it come out now; they claim I've got horns an' a forked tail as it is. I don't know what they'd do if the man the lyin' scoundrels call the party boss was showed to have cleaned out the clerk's office the day before the clerk shot himself. Think what Little Ethel would make o' that, Freem! Come, have sense. You talk like a feller that was just ready to kick over the hull applecart. I can't see what's got into ye! But o' course, you're only talkin'; you'll never tell about that note. It'll be hard enough to collect if you lay low. Of course, if you don't I can't hold out much hopes, Freem!"

This entirely detached view of his own solvency, and the really cogent practical arguments in this speech of Mr. Upright's made an impression on Fremont. It finally controlled his action, in the matter of the note.

You may think from this episode of the practical arrangements for the public affairs in which he was enmeshed, that he had taken the dreadful things which had come upon him with a calmness not quite creditable to him. But Catherine and May could have told you something of the extent to which his whole being was devastated by the affliction; and his mother understood it completely. He was calm. He rose to the occasion and took charge of the affairs of the family in a manner that seemed to speak well for his latent capacity for command. He had found the will of Captain Ashe among his papers, giving all his possessions to his daughters, "or the survivor or survivors of them at his death," with his beloved daughter Catherine as executrix, "to serve without bond." Poor Captain Ashe! Those possessions constituted the liability to pay debts and protect his name against the consequences of the bewilderment of a mind puffed up with conceit by a small victory, in the little labyrinth of Monterey politics, which, small as was its area, was beset with the gins and man-traps of settled irregularities and established turpitude, to the real character of which the captain had been in the main quite blind.

This may always be said after any system of what we now call graft and boodling is uncovered in public life; many of the men engaged in it will be found to have entered it quite innocently, to have accepted things as they found them, to have used the system built up by others for carrying on the government. Most of those in the ranks have a devotion to it altogether beyond what their selfish interests can call for; and are controlled by a sort of perverted patriotism which has many of the admirable qualities of that which is real. The people themselves share the blame with the active wrongdoers, because in many cases, they have allowed to persist a form of government that generates corruption as inevitably as a bad engine generates friction and wastes power. No fallacy is so mischievous as the saying that it

makes no difference what the scheme of government, if officials are honest and efficient.

The scheme of government is as important as the plan on which a private business is carried on. A bad system, like that which exists in the American county government, ordains inefficiency, commands dishonesty, and makes the incompetent and dishonest the very one who finds the work of government most attractive. I think Fremont McConkey was an honest boy, but we now find him tangled in this Monterey County political net as deeply as was Captain Ashe before him—though I hope in quite a different way. He was a green clodhopper, and went into it without knowing what it was. These remarks do not excuse the evils of government. They only point to the fact that they can not be cured by prosecutions, or spasms of house-cleaning, important as they are. A stable always grows filthy again after any cleaning—if it is fit for nothing, and is used for nothing, but a shelter for beasts. The House of Government should be a palace, aired, lighted, ventilated, clean and used as a palace should be used. The matter is one for statesmen, not for courts.

Fremont's mother came to the funeral and stayed a fortnight with her son, and with the Ashe girls, as a helper and comforter. The tiny little Fernando seemed likely to lose his slight hold on life and join his mother in her journey to help her father; but Kate McConkey and Catherine aligned themselves with nature, and the little grip tightened, and Fernando stayed. Mrs. McConkey's solicitude was divided between Winifred's baby and her own. She saw Fremont go out each morning with pale face and step studiedly firm, and return from his office, and from conferences with bankers, politicians and friends, and seat himself by the chair his wife had vacated when she went to her bed, and gaze into space before him, or cast his eyes deliberately about him, with a look of speculative and inquiring desolation such as

Chang or Eng might have exhibited had his fellow Siamese twin been amputated from him by the cutting at one stroke of the living tie which bound them, and the severing of the common channel in which flowed their very hearts' blood.

One night Mrs. McConkey could not sleep. She arose and walked about the house in her slippers, visiting the room in which Catherine lay with the new baby in her care, and turned down the blanket and looked at the child with maternal tenderness. She stood for a moment in the dim light of the night lamp and regarded Catherine so lovingly that I believe the girl felt the outflow of yearning, for she smiled a little in her sleep. But Mrs. McConkey could not go back to her couch. She passed and repassed her son's door very silently, and finally she noiselessly pushed it open and went in. He was lying on his side with his back toward the door by which she entered, and seemed asleep; but as she softly stopped and silently stood over him, he turned his face upward, and when he saw her he put out his hand. She took him in her arms as she had done when he was a baby, wiped away his tears, and without a word, held him for a long time until with the same long-drawn, quivering sighs with which he had been used to go off to sleep when a child, he lapsed into slumber. She laid his head on the pillow, kissed him softly on the brow and left him. She went from room to room and enjoined silence on every one before they rose. Breakfast was silently prepared. No chair was moved. In that quiet country town, the chill autumn day passed with none of the noise which disturbs it in these days. When Fremont did not rise for breakfast, his mother said that he must not be called, and word was taken to the office by May that he would not come before noon, and might not be in the office that day. All day he slept, and all night; and when late the second morning he came down to breakfast, a complete day had dropped out of his memory. But his

healing had taken place. All that was required now was the adjustment of the burden to his shoulders.

He never knew how to thank his mother for what she did that night. Reverently, but with knowledge that there are no words to express the inexpressible, he does so now. For the stroke was one which seemed too terrible for him to bear. He was fully convinced that so large a part of his life had been shorn away, that he would always be maimed and crippled. He had no doubt that he would always be unhappy. He felt that his great love had come to him and been taken away. This idea he long cherished as a thing certain. But after that night's comfort, he began to believe that he could go on, making the fight which he saw before him, establishing himself somehow in the world, rearing the children. And when the problem of his children, their rearing and nurture, began to loom up before him as the work to which he must address himself, resolutely and adequately, it replaced grief with care. He must talk with Catherine and May. Before his mother went away, an understanding must be established. The same thought was in her mind. As they sat in the old sitting-room, the day before Frank came with the democrat wagon to take her back to the farm, with the two babies asleep under the eye of Catherine, she spoke of it.

"Before I go," said she, "there's something I want to speak about. I think Catherine's worked out the right way to feed and take care of little Fernando. I thought she'd need me; but shucks! she's got me beat a thousand miles when it comes to ticklish things in baby-raisin'—"

Catherine reached over and pressed the older woman's hand.

"I can't let you say that," said she. "You've been like an angel from Heaven for us!"

"Like a ministering angel," said May, coming to her and

kissing her forehead. "We should have been lost without you!"

"All a notion," said Mrs. McConkey. "But I'm glad you appreciate all I'd have done if it had been called for, an' I'd knowed enough. But what I want to have a talk about is the future. Now it hain't to be expected that you two young girls will want to tie yourselves all your lives to the care of a couple of children, no matter how much you love 'em. They hain't yourn an' you hain't responsible for 'em. Things'll change. Youth is a time of change, an' you're all young, with your lives before ye. Even Fremont's nothing much but a boy, an' I hope anyhow that things'll change for him, too. Now as I say, you girls ain't responsible for these little ones; but Fremont is, an' I'm responsible f'r him. So that puts it up to me. I've begun to feel real silly about these babies, already. I love 'em! An' while we are only farmers, an' more or less ignorant, we raised Freem here, an' Alvin has told me that our home is open to receive him an' his babies, or the babies without him, any day or night, an' we'll do for 'em with as much love in our hearts as we ever had f'r him! An' that's what I wanted to say. I wanted to say it to you all together, Catherine an' May an' Fremont, so you'd feel anyhow, that there's some one else to help carry the burden if it gits so it keeps you or any of you from any life you feel as if you wanted to take up. An' we'll do it freely an' thankfully!"

She was smiling now, with the tears running down her cheeks. Fremont sat in silence. He felt that it was a time for Catherine to state her position. Catherine looked at him without speaking. It seemed to her that her position must be clearly known, and that if it was to be modified, Fremont was the one to speak. It was the gipsy-like little May who broke the silence.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "Why, Mrs. McConkey! You

don't think that Cathie and I would let Winnie's babies go away from Cathie, do you!"

"Of course she doesn't!" answered Catherine. "She's just letting us know how willing she is to help. That's all. I feel as if these babies were mine, you know!"

"I know," replied Mrs. McConkey. "It's the mother in you just as much as the sister! I know! I feel it, too."

"I wanted for Fremont to speak," said Catherine. "Winnie said she wanted me to care for the babies. I should grieve very much to lose them, or be separated from them; but they are his children, and he is the person to say what shall be done. I—May and I—have talked about it. We have the home here, for all of us. Fremont has his position, for a long time yet. Why can't we go on just as before—or as nearly the same as is possible after our great loss? That's what May and I have been asking each other."

"I'll be more help to Cathie than I have been," said May. "I have always been pretty worthless—don't stop me, Cathie, I have!—but Mrs. McConkey has been showing me about the work, and I mean to take hold and do so much that Cathie can just devote herself to making Lorena and little Fernando grow like weeds. And we need Fremont, Cathie and I do. He's been the best brother to us! And to break up our home—it would be awful!"

"I understand you and Cathie," said Fremont, "just as I understand ma. You're all trying to make a show of selfishness when you devote yourselves to my babies and me! What Cathie and May say they want is just what I want, too. I know what ma means when she speaks of the children keeping you girls from any life you feel you should enter. Sometime you'll want to marry, maybe. But if you can only help me through for a year or two years—every month will make it easier for me, for I shall now study law. I must establish myself in life for the sake of Lorena and the baby. And I'll never forget the generosity of you who

are willing to help me. The three best women in the whole world!"

So it was settled with protests on the part of May against the very idea that she would marry and leave this nice family they were going to have, and smiles on Catherine's face that were more convincing to Fremont than May's protestations.

Mrs. McConkey went home with a feeling of satisfaction in her breast that her boy and his little ones had weathered a wild tempest, and come to harbor, battered, but safe. She had a long talk with Catherine alone that night. She told the girl about Fremont's temperament, and was surprised to discover how well Catherine already knew it.

"He'll need to have you show him a lot of indulgence," said she. "It's hard for him to show his feelin's, an' often when he gits sore and wore out in his mind, he acts so it's 'most impossible to live with him. He don't mean no harm. Try an' overlook things. He feels when he's alone that there's nothing left in life for him."

"I know," replied Catherine. "I'm afraid he'll never lose that feeling."

"He's young," said Mrs. McConkey. "He's growin' yet in his mind and soul. It's kind o' mournful, to think it; but the time'll come in the course o' nature, when he'll look back to this grief as if it was in some other life, or in an awful dream. Otherways, he couldn't live—none of us could. The hurt will heal, even if it does leave a scar or a limp. An' Fremont's got a medicine that most folks hain't. I mean, books. He hain't been readin' much lately, but he's going back to it. He was readin' that fool stuff they call poetry—Browning—last night. I know him, Cathie. When he can read, he's got a new Heaven an' a new earth to explore, an' if you can give him trips into it, he'll be greatly helped to git well of his hurts. God bless you, Cathie. You seem like a daughter of my own!"

He would not have failed to resent this forecast of his mother's, if he had heard it. Catherine was not able quite to believe in it. But Mrs. McConkey, as we who stand afar off and calmly estimate probabilities, was, of course, very likely to be right.

The Ashe residence was once more lighted brightly at night, and far into the night, for here Fremont read after he had finished his law reading at the office of N. V. Creede. Here they rejoiced in the sober way which was the only fitting one, when the news came that Fremont was elected to the office of clerk of the courts. Here they planned things for the babies, and watched over them when their teeth and other things made them restless or ill. The three young people grew after a while to feel very much as if the captain had gone out for the evening to some place where he would be doing something good and beautiful, and that Winifred was lying down for a little while in the next room. And all the time they read and thought. After all these years, it seems clear that their lives were lifted to a higher spiritual level by their unselfish devotion to the growing babes, to each other, and by Fremont's new fever for intellectual marching, in which the girls joined when they liked; or they "abode by the stuff," as did the two hundred of the Children of Israel when David went on that early march of his. Fremont seemed very solidly established, with his two sisters-in-law, in their home, with the babes. But when did such a man have any continuing city?

BOOK SIX

CHAPTER I

THE NECESSITY OF SAVING MAY

I DECLARE, I sympathize with the historians whom I have always condemned! I have always blamed them for telling us so much about a few monarchs and their nobility, and so little about the price of wheat and how a man lived who worked for a living—and here I am, straying off into the field of private passions and individual triumphs and troubles while writing the annals of Monterey County. I am just as bad as the rest of the historians. Well, it is too late to reform now. I may as well continue to follow my nose wherever it goes, no matter how awry it stands in the matter of snooping into the private affairs of my people. Perhaps it is as good a method as any, for my people are just common folks, and their lives are samples whereby the mass may be judged. And even in the history of such a coral reef as Iowa, the individual loves, hates, marriages and givings in marriage of the individual polyps—I am not sure they have any—are the events which culminate in the lush

greenery of the peopled isle with its palm-bearded shore rejoicing in the riot of the white and green where the foam so softly hides the teeth of the reefs.

It is an historic fact that Miss May Ashe became the second deputy clerk of the courts when Owen Gowdy was moved up to Fremont's place as Fremont became clerk. The books show it. Old politicians remember it. Duncan McAlpine told me yesterday that if Fremont McConkey hadn't made the office such a family affair, with his sister's sweetheart as first deputy and his pretty sister-in-law for second, he'd have been reelected at the end of his first term as every decent county officer expects to be. He didn't know, as Mr. James E. Boyd might have told him, that Fremont and the captain's daughters had undertaken to pay off the shortages in the captain's accounts, prevent Mr. Boyd as bondsman from having the debts to discharge, and to protect the Ashe family against disgrace; and that the money earned by May in the clerk's office most of it went for that purpose, while Catherine, with the help of a hired girl, took care of the house and the babies.

There is no reason why Fremont should have hated Paul Holbrook for this, but he did. Paul's investigators working for the Citizens' Committee simply found out what had happened—and in view of the fact that Captain Ashe had passed away, they published nothing about it. Fremont would have denied that he hated Paul, but it may as well be admitted that he did. Every one in the court-house hated him. Fremont had been encouraged to believe that the Board of Supervisors might find a way to wipe out some of the captain's shortage, by cancelling a goodly sum of fees for which he was legally bound to account, and had never done so. As between earning these sums for the county and having the county lose them, it may as well be admitted that Fremont would have chosen the latter. For Fremont in person was in no wise responsible for the de-

falcation. His conscience was clear. If he could have got rid of the whole burden by some composition with the county accompanied by no publicity or disgrace, he would have done so.

But Paul's "spies" made this impossible. The Board of Supervisors were terrorized by the fact that they knew that their dark deeds were some of them now discovered, and they feared that Paul Holbrook's knowledge was more complete than it was. When Jim Boyd and Raws Upright went to them asking them to let up on Fremont and the Ashe estate—and incidentally on Mr. James E. Boyd's bank—they said frankly that they were scared at what these disturbers and muck-rakers led by Paul Holbrook, and backed up secretly by the First National and old Jase Holbrook, were cooking up against the county government.

"You'll have to let 'er ride a while," said Walter Byington, chairman of the Board. "Wait till this bad smell blows away. This thing you ask is all right, but it's got to be done when everybody's not looking."

And then the bad smell intensified. One day there was a dreadful hurrying from office to office in the court-house. Paul Holbrook was going before the grand jury with a lot of absurd charges against the county officers. They wouldn't get far with that, though, was the court-house opinion; for they had fixed it for their friends to be on the grand jury—fixed it with the district attorney, who was a candidate for the judgeship, and stood in with the crowd; but this infernal mischief-maker Holbrook had filed a suit to enjoin Joe Zentz, the county treasurer, from paying interest on all those county warrants Jim Boyd held in the bank, and to have them declared invalid, principal and interest, because of irregularities and false pretenses and invalidities in their issuance. Why, it might break the Monterey State Bank! And worse yet, he had brought suit to oust from office, not only every member of the Board of Supervisors, but also

Joe Zentz, county treasurer, Albert Junkins, auditor, and Charles Fleming, sheriff. They were in for a fight. If Captain Ashe were alive, they'd have been after him, too—the malicious, moss-back, unprogressive back-number scoundrels! The only reason why they hadn't attacked Freem McConkey was that he'd just come in and hadn't had time to do anything yet. And Freem needn't think he was out of the woods yet, either, said Joe Zentz, who, pale and trembling, was talking to Fremont about it.

"They'll probably file suit against you as soon as their spies can find any excuse in the books."

"But I have done nothing wrong!" expostulated Fremont, thinking of how he had mortgaged himself to Jim Boyd to protect the county's interests; but not, perhaps, giving due weight to the thought that he had done it for the sake of the Ashe girls and their pride in their father's reputation.

"Done nothing wrong!" said Joe explosively. "What difference does that make? Who the hell of us *has* done anything wrong? All we've done is to try to build up this county and town, and give it roads and bridges, and run things on a liberal and progressive scale! Wrong! You make me sick!"

It was a reign of terror and the thing that surprised Fremont was the failure of the people to rise and crush the tyrants and the slaves who deck'd their meads with graves. The people seemed to be with Paul, except for those who did not seem to care; and the faithful over the county who stood with the court-house crowd with their backs to the wall. All this is Monterey County history; the point is, that it made it hard for Fremont and the girls to carry out their contract with Mr. Boyd—and it made Mr. Boyd himself, now for the first time feeling like a cornered rat, quite prone to act like one. An it made Paul very hateful to Fremont; so hateful that Fremont was vexed with May

It made Mr. Boyd, feeling like a cornered rat, act like one.

Ashe for her failure to hate Paul as bitterly as she should have done. He had actually seen her walking on the street with Paul. Paul had on one or two occasions come to the Ashe door with her, indicating that they were together oftener than Fremont knew. When Fremont kindly remonstrated with her—for they were on terms of close affection—she answered that she didn't see that it was her duty to choose her friends with regard to any old lawsuits.

"Catherine," said Fremont one evening when May was out—and, he feared, in company with Paul Holbrook—"don't you think you might talk with May about the impropriety of her going with Paul Holbrook? I think it ought to be pointed out to her. She was very strongly against him once. I think she might see it in the right light if you were to talk with her, Cathie."

"Is there anything so very wrong about it, Fremont?" asked Catherine.

"I would rather see her dead," said Fremont, "than married to Paul Holbrook!"

"I didn't know you felt so strongly about it," replied Catherine in astonishment. "I don't believe there is any thought on May's part that it will lead to anything. But think how young she is, Fremont, and what a blessing it is to her to be free to choose her companions! And so many people think that Paul is doing a good work, even if it is hard on us. I'll talk to May and tell her how you feel—but I think Paul has already explained the matter from his point of view. I can't promise that I can do anything."

"He's acting like a wild beast!" exclaimed Fremont. "We ought to treat him like one!"

I hope that the reader will do Fremont justice, when I set down the fact as to his present attitude toward life. It was changing rapidly toward the normal. He had read an essay before the literary club of the Unitarian Church

on one of the evenings devoted to the study of Tennyson, which brought him such praise as to have made him almost happy for a moment. He found here a group of people of real culture, with an outer fringe of those who only thought they thought. But the choice few had shown that they were astonished at the ability with which he had handled the subject; as well they might have been in their ignorance of the fact that Fremont had lived with Tennyson since that day when Marshall Doughty had given him the paper-covered copy of the poems, saying that he could get nothing out of it. Paul Holbrook, who was a member of this inner group, merely passed him by with a curt congratulation. Fremont felt that if Paul had been a better man, they might have been friends; as they had begun to be before this iniquity of Paul's.

That evening proved to him that Monterey was not all engrossed in town lots, new business blocks, railways and county litigation. Here were men and women, some members of this little church, some drawn there by the companionship of a community of thought, with whom he yearned to have closer intimacy. He felt a sense of brotherhood to them. He had not supposed there was any such group in the little city—though he had known nearly every one of them before. He had never seen them turned over to show their other side. There is such a group in every "Monterey" in the land. The art of knowing them is the trick of turning them over.

May was with Fremont that evening at the literary club, as was almost always the case when he attended any evening affair. He was solicitous to invite her. It seemed to him that he ought to do his best to introduce into her life and that of Catherine any amusement which lay in his power; but Catherine seemed to feel that the babies were likely to have something calamitous happen to them if she left them for an hour. Sometimes if the affair were a mu-

sical one, she would accompany Fremont, and give way for an evening to her love for music and the enjoyment of meeting her friends—and all were her friends; but it was usually the little, dark, vivacious and bewitching May who went, thus bringing on Fremont the jealous envy of a majority of the young men of Monterey. Was it not enough, they said, that he had her with him all the time every day in his office, where she made a romance, in their eyes, of the broad pages of orders of courts, decrees and judgments perpetuated in that fine, backward-sloping handwriting of hers, without monopolizing her of evenings? Fremont had grown to feel rather unsatisfied with any evening from which May was eliminated.

"I'm proud of you!" said May.

They walked home, because the street-car had just passed the church when they came out, and they knew it would be half an hour before another would pass. The new street-car system looked metropolitan, but the Holbrooks, Boyds and Smythes of the business world were waiting month by month to see it fail for lack of patronage—and lived to see it fail twice and become a fortune for its last owners.

Fremont was rather proud of himself, and the affectionate pressure of May's tiny hand on his arm made him still prouder. He was sure that his Tennyson paper was a thing of ripe scholarship, fine poetic feeling and excellent art in composition—but he would not have admitted as much.

"Oh, it was nothing to be proud of," said he, "they just said that to be polite."

"But I heard them talking back in the audience—talking to each other; and they were awfully complimentary. Mrs. Smythe told—I heard her half whisper to some one—that it was the best paper they had ever had; and he—whoever it was she told—said that it clearly was the best.

So I was proud of you before they patted you on the back the way they did. But that was nice, too!"

She did not tell him, though she came near it, that it was to Paul Holbrook that Mrs. Smythe had made this remark, and that it was Paul who had joined in her encomiums. May was becoming cautious about bringing the villain of the Monterey drama upon the stage.

As the two years of his term of office passed, and as the attack of the Citizens' Committee gathered way, not only in the courts but in its influence over the people; and as the demands of the debts of Captain Ashe became more pressing on his estate, with the inevitable hardships upon his daughters and Fremont, Fremont grew more and more bitter toward Paul Holbrook. This bitterness was made more acrid by Fremont's belief that Paul had serious designs on the affections of May. She was as affectionate to Fremont as ever. She spoke, whenever he would allow it, of his nobility in working to help her and Catherine out of their difficulties. When Mr. Boyd pressed them for a deed of their house in part settlement of the debts, made necessary, he said, by payments he had been obliged to make as Captain Ashe's bondsman, and the failure of Raws Upright to make any payments on the note he had given for the money he had "practically robbed the county of" by borrowing it the morning before the tragedy of the shooting trip, Fremont felt sure that it was Paul Holbrook who was forcing Boyd to exert this pressure. Not that there was any hope of saving the home; but when Wilbur Smythe appeared upon the scene, and bought the house and lot for much more than Boyd had been willing to allow as a credit for it, Boyd did not seem altogether pleased, though every cent of the money went to him; and Fremont felt his suspicions of Paul Holbrook justified, when after a transfer or so, the title to the place turned up in the First National Bank of which Paul's father was president.

"It was a Holbrook scheme from the beginning!" said Fremont in the privacy of the family circle that night. "The whole family are vultures. My father slaved for years to pay his tribute to the Holbrook voracity!" And so on, with much fullness.

"It seems to me," said May, "that we owe them our gratitude, if one can say that about what must have been a purely financial move on their part. We get much more of our debt wiped out by the Holbrooks than we should have got by the Boyds. It seems so to me, you know."

There was no answer to this, but it was bitter to pay rent to the Holbrooks. May might have informed him that Paul Holbrook had bought the property himself, in an access of indignation at Boyd's scheme to act the vulture on the dead carcass of Captain Ashe's estate. I happen to know that now. I wonder how it would have affected Fremont McConkey then? I wonder, because I know his state of mind.

He knew the grand passion, except his own, through the literature of novels, and he convinced himself that May was in danger of sacrificing herself to a man whom she could not love, in order that she might free him, Fremont McConkey, from the burden of her support after their present means of livelihood should dissolve in the sea of political change, and he, Fremont, would be nothing but a briefless lawyer who had been stripped of his savings by the demands of her father's misdoings. He yearned to save her this sacrifice. She was too sweet, too dear, to be thus crucified by marriage to a man who, after the first period of love which must in the nature of things be one-sided, would look down on her as the daughter of a defaulter. She would be held in contempt, as such, by Paul's family with their pride of purse and their religion of solvency, while she on her part, would be miserable all her life—a life of bondage to the man who had hounded her father to his death.

You see he was not quite logical; for so far as I can see now, the captain's death was as far removed as possible from his troubles, or in fact, it seems that if there had been a Citizens' Committee and a Paul Holbrook ten years before, one may imagine the captain as having been a thoroughly excellent clerk of the courts, dying in his bed surrounded by children and grandchildren—of whom there is now a considerable flock. But Fremont was harassed and tortured and embittered—and Paul Holbrook was the very principle of Misfortune for him and Catherine and May. He could not see her married to young Holbrook! Surely there was some way in which to prevent it. Why was Catherine so complete a failure in aiding him in his efforts to save May from a life of misery! As the months passed and the belief grew upon him that Paul and May met oftener and oftener, the conviction possessed him that she was driven, by consideration for Fremont, to the thought of marriage with a man against whom her very nature, just because it was so fine and delicate, must surely revolt eventually, even though it did not now do so, by reason of her very innocence and youth. He must do something!

If you imagine him as walking the floor of nights, and passing through the streets as a man in whose wild eye the crowd might see the evidences of a soul in torture, you will be greatly mistaken. Neither Catherine nor May ever suspected his condition. Nor did N. V. Creede, the man with whom he was now most closely associated. He was reading law under Mr. Creede, and enjoying a close intellectual companionship with his acute and analytical mind.

Mr. Creede began by saying that he was an old-fashioned lawyer, and while he knew that the law schools were taking up a different method, for his part, he believed that the best foundation for the law was a knowledge of Blackstone. He had begun with Blackstone, and he would advise Fremont to do the same. Then he could follow with

Kent's Commentaries, after which he would be ready for *Chitty on Pleading,* with Sir James Fitz James Stephen's sketchy work on *Pleading* sandwiched in subject by subject, to give the student some notion of progress on this sublime phase of the law. Then *Wharton's Criminal Law.* They would select the work on Equity Jurisprudence later. After the first year it would be well to read *Wait's Actions and Defenses* as a kind of review, and the Iowa cases cited in the notes. If any of his two years were left, they could decide on what should be done with it.

"But of course," said he, "admission to the bar is only the beginning of reading. Start in with Blackstone, who was said by one of the great jurists of the English-speaking world to have made the law easy. It may not seem so damned easy at times, Freem, but pitch in. Here's the library. Go to it!"

Catherine and May thought him a most diligent student; and even Creede, while he found fault with him for reading Henry George and Herbert Spencer, and some poems and novels, expressed satisfaction after every quiz. He went to the office every morning, but not in the evening, save when court was in session, and he was needed by Mr. Creede. Catherine arranged a study for him in the parlor, but he used to sit with her and May and the babies through long evenings with his Blackstone, sometimes reading to them some passage which struck him as amusing or historically interesting, or absurd as showing his author's devotion to the law of England just as it was, its every letter sacred. Catherine's comments were most interesting. He often told her she would make a lawyer; and she said she believed she would, after the children were grown up, if he would offer her a partnership. Nothing would please him more he said; and the firm of McConkey & Ashe was often spoken of as a thing sure to come into being.

Fremont found the first book of Blackstone of "The

Rights of Persons" not so very hard, and while almost devoid of thrill, really interesting. But the next book, "Of the Rights of Things" caused him to wrestle powerfully with the desire to chuck the whole affair of the law, and look elsewhere for a career. But he stuck on doggedly, in spite of the intricacies of the rights of things, with their leases, releases, entries and feoffments, uses and trusts, covenants to stand seized, tenendums, habendums, reddendums, executed and contingent remainders, executory devises, and shifting and springing uses. What the deuce did they have to do with practising law in Monterey, Iowa?

"Which Doctrine," he read one night to Catherine as the conclusion of a wonderful passage in Blackstone, "when devises by will were again introduced, and considered as equivalent to declarations of uses, was also adopted in favour of *executory devises*. But herein these, which are called *contingent* or *springing* uses, differ from an executory devise; in that there must be a person seized to such uses at the time when the contingency happens, else they can never be executed by the statute; and therefore if the estate of the feoffee to such uses be destroyed by alienation or otherwise, before the contingency arises, the use is destroyed forever; whereas by an executory devise the freehold itself is transferred to the future devisee. And in both these cases, a fee may be limited to take effect after a fee; because, though that was forbidden by the common law in favour of the lord's escheat, yet when the legal estate was not extended beyond one fee-simple, such subsequent uses (after a use in fee) were before the statute permitted to be limited in equity; and then the statute executed the legal estate in the same manner as the use before subsisted."

"I've read it over and over," said Fremont in despair, "and it all runs together in my head like gibberish."

"Poor Fremont!" exclaimed May. "It *is* gibberish. Does it actually mean anything?"

"Mighty little," said Fremont, closing the book disgustedly. "It meant something once; but it doesn't any more. And I have to study it!"

"It sounds," said Catherine, "like

> " 'Affection's charms no longer gild
> The idol of the shrine;
> But cold Oblivion seeks to fill
> Regret's ambrosial wine!'

Only the verses have rhyme without reason. Blackstone seems to lack both. But I suppose he has the reason—if I could understand it."

"Well, reading this stuff is a mighty hard way to serve the Lord," said Fremont moodily.

"Or Mammon," added Catherine. "Don't you understand it at all?"

"Oh, I can check back and ponder on it, and grasp it for a moment—but it's a century out of date."

"I suppose Mr. Creede knows it by heart," said May.

"Not he!" asserverated Fremont. "Neither do any of the lawyers. It's just my initiation, you know! If the book was mine, I'd burn it!"

"Well, if I were in your place," said Catherine, "I should take my initiation, and I shouldn't be frightened when I failed to understand any matter in the law, unless it happened to be something that other lawyers weren't puzzled by."

Fremont sat thinking over this for some time. Then he picked up the book, found his place, and prepared to read more about the springing and shifting uses.

"That's the wisest thing that's ever been said to me," said he. "Where others are puzzled I shall not be ashamed to be, at first, anyhow!"

Which rule I commend to all young practitioners. Whatever puzzles the other side may perplex without disgracing you. The judge on the bench—your target—will be as much in the dark as are you and your learned brother representing the plaintiff; and so will the Supreme Court if the controversy ever comes before it; but it will have the advantage of having the last guess.

Young Mr. McConkey's progress in the law was gratifying, in spite of the executory devises, and of the alien distractions in books and hearts of which I have made mention, and of his frequent labors for the *Monterey Journal,* which must have infuriated that jealous mistress, the law, if she found out about them. His spear in local journalism had now no brother; for "Little Ethel" Braithwaite had received a legacy from an aunt or some other relative in England, and gone home to drink it up. This was sure to happen at some time, for such Britishers are always receiving legacies or bequests. Fremont was glad for Braithwaite's sake, but missed him sorely; for when he was properly mellowed his conversation was improving. It was like a glimpse into a life hitherto seen only in books. Battle with him in the papers was a liberal education in good form, in the courtesy of the lists, and in fine English. And he and "Little Ethel" liked each other.

Fremont absorbed these benefits from him and a few others as if there had been no babies, no office, no Blackstone, no Catherine and May, no liabilities of the Ashe estate, no May Ashe slipping down an abyss into the arms of an ogre in bifocal glasses who was buying her for glittering gold; for Fremont would have stored away knowledge had he been Victor Hugo's man in the quicksand, up to the exact moment when the enlizement was completed. He had that sort of mind. It had its air-tight compartments, each shut away from the other, and capable of separate use. But all this time, whenever he opened the

May-Ashe-Paul-Holbrook compartment, it was with a disturbance of spirit, with stress and anguish, and the growing feeling that he must do something.

He wondered what his dear Winifred would advise, if she could communicate with him. It had been a year and a half now since she had gone from him. He had taken back into his heart the old idols which she had expelled; but he still said to himself that in her he had had the great love of his life, and that the duty to protect May was really a duty to Winifred. But how to do this? The dear girl was at the parting of the ways—nay, perhaps she saw only one way before her.

Slowly it began to appear to Fremont that it lay in his power to give May a choice of courses. It came to him first one night as he lay half awake, half asleep—whether the product of the dream or the reason he could not tell. But he saw himself as the Other Way for May, the way of escape from the Holbrook Juggernaut.

When he went about his business next day, he was astonished at the idea which had come to him in this vision of the night. When he looked at May working on the records, he speculated on the theory of thought-transference, and hoped that it was not operative that day between them. He would have been grieved to have the calm affectionate regard of her great dark eyes changed to anything less warm and confiding, but even though he had passed through the great event of the heart, still there might be something approaching happiness could those eyes once be taught to warm and glow with the fires of something more tropical than she displayed in them now. His reason taught him that such a communication was not to be classed among the impossibilities. She was already fond of him, and he of her. Who could fail to be attracted—in a brotherly way, of course—to such a bewitching little creature, so true, so affectionate, so much like Winifred in many ways; but with

much more of that worldly wisdom, the absence of which made Winifred so enchanting, so like a heroine of a poet's dream. He could be a loving, a devoted husband to May. Marriage with her would solve a problem of their lives, and bind the three of them together into a single household once more, with the children now growing up beautifully under Catherine's care.

He tried to dismiss the dream from his mind, but it would not be dismissed; every time it recurred to him it would take possession of him more fully. I do not expect that he will be acquitted of the charge of seeking to gratify a desire, the harboring which he refused to admit, even to himself; but the thought in his mind continually was that of saving May from marriage with the man who could not possibly make her happy, because he had been the evil genius of her father and of the whole Ashe family. If he could save her from this by becoming her husband and giving her so much of love as he had, plus that warm affection for her of which he was so conscious, was it not obvious that it would be better for her, better for Catherine, better for them all, and far better for the children? I submit that he made out a good case for the proposal to May, which would at least give her a choice of courses. And as he noted that Paul Holbrook was, as he put it, "persecuting May with his attentions," he made his decision. He felt that he could delay no longer. It seemed to him that the dear girl was moody and distraught at times. It might be that that scoundrel was pressing her to a decision. There was no time to lose.

CHAPTER II

HOW SHE SAVED HERSELF

THE Great Resolution was heightened by the public affairs of the county. Paul Holbrook was about to show his hand in the persecution of the liberal and progressive group which had done nothing wrong, but had striven to build up the community in its peculiar forward-looking manner for so many years, as Joe Zentz had so forcefully said to Fremont McConkey. In other words, the hearing on the temporary injunction which had to do with the legality of the great amounts of county warrants and bonds in the hands of the Monterey State Bank, was about to take place. Paul Holbrook would now be obliged to tell the court in sworn affidavits the things his spies had exhumed from the county records or some of them, at least. The atmosphere about the court-house was tense. Living in this atmosphere as Fremont had done for years, with his spirit of partisanship aroused in behalf of Captain Ashe, with his devotion to the task of protecting the name of the family; conscious of his own integrity, and eager to believe in that of his political friends, Fremont's bitterness toward Holbrook, the Holbrook banking interests, the Citizens' Committee and all their doings, and especially Paul Holbrook's evil designs on May Ashe, became a sort of possession which dominated him to the extent of rendering him to some extent irresponsible.

Catherine had errands to do that morning, and May was to be given an hour or so of freedom from her work in the

office to look after Lorena, now a lovely little toddler, and Fernando, who was climbing about his crib and threatening all the time to crawl out and break his little nose on the floor. Catherine arose and went out, leaving Fremont and May lingering over breakfast. Fremont recognized the crisis. It was now or never!

"Nothing to do at the court-house this morning?" said Catherine to Fremont as she came back to the room in her hat.

"Not for me, for a little while," said Fremont.

"Well," said Catherine, looking at the young man in some anxiety at his evidences of suppressed feeling, "I'm a working girl, and must go. Don't worry, Fremont. Everything will come out right!"

I, if any one, ought to be able to tell what Fremont said and did, but it is impossible. Perhaps May remembers, but her testimony is for certain reasons unavailable. It is unimportant, anyhow. He had a program all mapped out, as most men have in such cases, except where the proposal simply happens. It would be ungallant to say that the thing is often engineered by the other member of the team and, therefore, I shall not say it. Certainly, this was not true in the case at bar, for she was not only surprised, but utterly astounded, when Fremont had succeeded in seating himself by her side on a sofa and asked her to marry him.

She looked up at him with a little, troubled, incredulous smile. "What in the world," said she, "are you saying?"

"May," he replied, "I don't wonder that you are surprised; but you ought not to be. You and I have been thrown together so much; you are so lovely and so lovable; you ought not to be surprised that I should love you and want you for my wife. That is what I am trying in my awkward way to tell you, May. I want you for my wife. Won't you say 'yes,' dearest? You will make me very happy!"

"Why, Fremont McConkey!"

The exclamation sounded as if he had dropped something and broken it. Fremont's arm slipped around the slender waist, and he drew her to him, tilted up her face with his hand under her chin, and kissed her. The blood suffused her face—a divine blush, it seemed—at first; and then she pushed him away with a strength which he remembered with astonishment, broke away from him as she rose to her feet, and Fremont recognized the fact that the red flush in her face was that of anger, not modesty.

"Never speak to me again!" she cried, as she ran out of the room.

He heard her as she flew up the stairs and into her room. He heard the slam of the door as she shut herself in. And he sat, feeling, and I have no doubt looking, very foolish for a long time—so long a time that he heard May come down the stairs dressed for the street, and pass out, after she had gone into the room where the babies were, and kissed them. Hilka, the German girl who was their "help," came to the children, and then spoke to Fremont without entering the room to say that she would mind the children until Catherine got back. This he took as a hint that he might go.

He went to the office in the court-house, but May had not come. All that forenoon, he went through his ordinary movements rather automatically. He was thinking of the manner in which he had bungled it. He should have remembered that, while the idea of an engagement with May had become very familiar to his mind in the past few weeks, it was so strange to her as to be almost incomprehensible. The transition from the brotherly-and-sisterly affection to this new status should have been prepared for. He would now be obliged to use gentleness and finesse with her, and thus undo the damage to his suit which he feared the morning's proposal had caused. He wished he had not kissed her; or that he had overcome all

her resistance by persevering in his caresses. He wished that he had done nothing at all—and still May did not come!

He dreaded to go home for his midday meal, but it seemed that perhaps the best thing for him to do was to behave as if nothing had happened, and leave the initiative in their new relations to May. If she ignored the affair it might be construed as a favorable sign. If she were kind as usual, it would be a permission still further to urge his suit. He would grasp the nettle of companionship firmly. He went home as usual.

May had not come home, said Catherine, cheerfully.

She had not been in the office that morning, said Fremont. He had not seen her since he left the house after breakfast.

"That's queer!" was Catherine's comment. "Well, this isn't a big enough city yet so that our sister is likely to be lost. We won't wait for her, Fremont."

It was rather an uncheerful meal; though Catherine tried to enliven it by tales of Lorena's unprecedented precocity, and of the most marvelous manner in which Fernando was gaining in weight and intelligence. She was sure he would be walking alone in a week or so, which would be doing remarkably well, when one considered how weak and tiny he was when he was born. She was a little hurt at the father's lack of interest in the conversation, and at the distraught manner of the man as he left almost without a word, quite omitting his usual good-by kiss for the babies. That vexatious injunction case was coming up this afternoon, she thought, and that might account for these aberrations.

He was late in getting to the court-house, and knowing that the great case was to open at the beginning of the afternoon session, he was surprised when he peeped into the court room, to see that the crowd had departed, and that the court seemed engaged in entering up defaults, hearing routine mo-

tions and similar unexciting matters. Fremont slipped down the back stairs to his office, looked about for May and saw that she was still absent, and finally observed Owen Gowdy standing in the door of the vault beckoning to him. When Fremont had followed him into the vault, Owen drew him behind a stack of records and spoke in a whisper.

"Do you know the big news?" he asked.

"I know that the county case is not on," replied Fremont. "What happened?"

"They gave Holbrook a continuance for three days," said Owen. "Young Walford came up from his office and asked for it. Creede didn't resist. But do you mean to say you don't know why he wanted the continuance?"

"No," said Fremont. "Wanted more time to cook up lies I s'pose! What did he say he wanted it for?"

"Well," said Gowdy, "it wasn't stated right out in court. N. V. just smiled and said that under the circumstances he'd waive any formal motion. Holbrook was married this morning at eleven, and he and his bride had gone off on a three days' tour, somewhere."

Fremont felt his muscles grow rigid as he braced himself for the shock.

"Married!" he whispered. "To——?"

"Yes," said Owen, "to your sister-in-law, and my fellow-deputy. May's gone over to the enemy, Freem!"

CHAPTER III

HOW IT APPEARED TO MOTHER

"OWEN," said Fremont impassively, after he had regained his calm in the gloom of the vault, "I'd like to have you go to my barn and hitch up the horse to the buggy, and drive it around here. Find out if Catherine knows about this elopement. If she doesn't know, break it to her gently as you can; and tell her I'm driving out to my mother's, and may not be home to-night. I'll be much obliged."

"Not at all," said Owen. "I'll be back in a few minutes. Got your overcoat?"

"No," said Fremont. "You might bring it. Catherine will give it to you. Tell her I'll be back sometime to-morrow."

Owen found Catherine calm but pale. She knew. She had received a scribbled note from May which ran something like this:

"Something has happened, Cathie, that has forced me to do something that I hope you will forgive. I may never explain, or perhaps I may. Only as you know, I could never marry Paul without a conflict with our obstinate brother, and therefore, among other reasons, I have done as Paul has urged me to do a thousand times, and married him. I shall return, very happy, in two or three days, and then I shall fall on your neck and ask you to forgive me for what will seem inexcusable haste. If you knew everything it would not go unexcused. Oh, Cathie, I know this means

the end of many sweet things, but I am still your littlest sister, and you and the babies will always be the dearest things to me, and I hope the nearest in love as well as companionship in my house, next to my darling Paul, who is everything that some of our family refuse to believe."

Catherine went about the house in amazement. She had no controlling feeling at first, save utter astonishment. She knew that May had given her heart to Paul, and that he had been rather insistent of late that she consent to an early marriage—and that May had always put him off with the question, "But what would Cathie do if I married you?"

"Come to live with us!" Paul would reply. "I don't deserve such luck as to have her with us, but I'd enjoy it. It would make us all the happier, darling!"

"But the babies?" May would ask. "She'd never leave the babies!"

"Sometime she'll have to," said Paul. "Their father would expect to care for them."

"But I'm not thinking of him so much as of Cathie," May would reply. "I believe she'd die if separated from them. She's had them ever since they were born. They're never out of her mind. They're the nearest thing to her heart. She just lives in and for them!"

"Then let her bring them, too," said Paul.

"I wonder what Fremont would say to that!" suggested May.

"Well, are we to be kept apart until those babies are grown up?" burst forth Paul. "Not if I know myself—and I think I do! I have no way of preventing Catherine's sacrificing herself for Winifred's babies; but I shall make my fight against the sacrifice of you, with myself added to the holocaust! And I shall win my fight, May—I shall win my fight!"

"How confident we are!" May would exclaim—and the

argument would end in the accepted way for lovers' differences, only to burst forth again at the next provocation.

Catherine from the back window saw Owen Gowdy run the buggy out of its shed, and hitch Fremont's horse to it. Why did not Fremont come himself? Where was he going? Surely he was not thinking of such a crazy thing as pursuit of the lovers! It would be almost like him to adopt that super-fatherly attitude in his solicitude for little May and his absurd dislike of Paul Holbrook; but why did he not come to her? Surely their years of affectionate relations, and their common interest in May ought to have brought Fremont to her at once on receipt of the startling news. And here he was, apparently going away; but perhaps Owen was the one who meant to use the horse. He was coming up to the back door. Catherine ran down the stairs to meet him.

"I see you know," said Owen. "What d'ye think of your new brother?"

"I know," said Catherine. "Where's Fremont?"

"I wonder if you'd give me his heavy overcoat," said Owen. "He's up at the office; but he's going out to his mother's he told me to tell you, and may not be back tonight."

Slowly Catherine went into the front hall for the coat, very slowly she brought it to Owen and handed it to him as she slipped something into the breast pocket.

"Tell him to read the letter in the breast pocket," she said—and closed the door in Owen's face.

She went back to Lorena and Fernando—to the maternal task which was her burden and her chief joy. She answered the prattlings of Lorena with her usual gentle voice and never-failing smile. She prepared the food for the baby and snuggled him to her breast with a warmth of pressure which was more fervent, if possible, than usual. May was gone. All she had left now was her babies—and

the making of a home for Fremont. This idea brought her to an almost subconscious dwelling on the future of the home, and of the babies and herself. She knew that Fremont had little hope of being kept in his office for another term, and their financial position would be a rather straitened one; for Roswell Upright had not paid his note, and their money—May's and Fremont's—had all been taken for those old debts except the barest living for them. They had been happy in making the sacrifice, and her heart warmed to Fremont for his unselfishness and nobility in sacrificing so much for her and May. But what would she and Fremont do? He had been admitted to the bar, but he would have no law practise—and their home itself had been swallowed up in the ravenous maw of debt. She and Fremont would be obliged to act wisely and energetically if they were to do their duty by those blessed children; but she had no doubt that they could succeed. Nobody really wanted in Iowa then, who was willing to work. It was a land of freedom of opportunity, even though the opportunity was usually a meager one. She and Fremont would work together.

Then she recalled that odd passage in May's hasty note in which she had said that she hoped that Cathie and the children would be the closest companions in her house, "after her dear Paul." What did she mean by that? Their friends among the women had often spoken of how nice it was that she and May could be together, and always with a suggestion that if there were not the two of them they could not have "kept the family together." She understood, in an aloof sort of way, what they meant. They meant that in that town, with its gossips and scandal-mongers, there would be nasty talk if she, a young woman, and Fremont, her young brother-in-law, were to go on living in the same house with the children. For they would be quite alone, perhaps out on some farm—God knew where—without

Hilka or any other domestic help. But that this sordid attitude on the part of the community could ever be allowed to affect her life, never occurred to her. The children must be cared for. She and Fremont must do it. She drew Lorena up on her lap with little Fernando, and hugged them both, as she thought of their father going out to advise with his mother.

But why did he go to her? True she was his mother, and they were very close to each other; but what could Mrs. McConkey do to solve their problems? Then she thought of the offer which the McConkeys had made him when Winnie died, to take the babies and care for them. Terror came upon her! If Fremont had gone out to perfect some plan for breaking up their home, and taking her babies from her, he was cruel! She could not endure it! Why, she had taken them both when they were so tiny, and Fernando so uncertain of his grasp on life, and washed them, dressed them, fed them, cared for them, until they were a part of her. They were a part of her more than of Fremont, even though he was their father. The law might give them to him, but if it did, why had it abolished burning at the stake? She would die if she lost them! The maternal instinct is a strange thing. I have seen a hen trying to mother a litter of young rabbits, and flying at every imaginary foe in a fury; and a gentle cow will sometimes have awakened in her this mother-love for a little pig, and will give her life in its defense. The woman is only the female of the animal kingdom, plus; and the overplus in Catherine's case was the fact that the children were her Winnie's babies, and that Winnie with her dying breath had given them to her. Could Fremont be so wicked as to take them from her then?

I think Fremont would have been more unhappy than was actually the case, if he could have known of the poor girl in Monterey who struggled with these problems that night, in an agony of terror.

As it was he looks back upon that time with something like pity for himself. He read the letter from May to Catherine which he found in the breast-pocket of his coat, with some relief. May had not told Catherine of Fremont's great blunder. He now knew that it was not only a blunder, but he now suspected that he had made of himself what "Little Ethel" would call an egregious ass. It had upset everything. It had driven May into Paul Holbrook's arms. When he came to see, which he did very soon, that she must have been wanting to go to that shelter, it surprised him to find how little it pained him. He felt no jealousy—only sorrow that such a man was to win a great prize like May. In fact, as he drove along the road to his father's farm, he was angry at himself at feeling a little relief at the confrontation of the fact that he would not be married to May —and she so sweet and lovely! The blush that he felt burning in his face at the thought of how he had embraced and kissed her, was a blush of shame and disgust—at having half been carried away by the girl's charm, and half acting a part—as if a proposal of marriage must perforce be staged as if in a play. How good of her to protect him in that letter to Cathie! It was to be their secret, that proposal. He should not be obliged to tell it to his mother. He hoped she would not reveal it to Paul—and again he tingled with a blush for his shame in case Paul should learn of it and reveal it.

The early darkness had come before he reached his old home, and a northwest wind was driving great clouds before it as it roared through the grove he had helped to plant. He halted his horse out by the stable, and looked around him. It was the old scene which had so often filled him with discontent in the years gone by—the whipped haystacks which seemed scourged by the wind; the cattle sheltering by the great straw-stack under the lee overjet which they had made by eating out the bottom, some tumble-weeds from

a new broken field rolling across the yard, the row of high willows in which roosted turkeys clinging to the limbs in the gale, and over all that deep roar of the wind. It was a most disagreeable night out-of-doors; and yet as he looked about him he wished he had never left the farm, never met Captain Ashe that day when they shot prairie chickens, never made his great "success" in politics. He wished that he were this night bedding down his horses after a long day in the corn-husking, with a bountiful supper awaiting him in the cozy kitchen. Frank came out of the stable and recognized his turnout.

"Hello, Freem," he said. "That you?"

"Yes," replied Fremont. "Got room for my horse tonight?"

"Plenty," said Frank. "Go in and get warm. I'll put in the horse. Is she cool enough to water? What do you feed? Tell ma I'll be in right off!"

"Why, Fremont," exclaimed his mother and Sarah in unison as he entered. "What's the matter! Is any one sick?"

"No," said Fremont, kissing them. "I just came out, that's all. You all well?"

His father came in and greeted him with rather unusual warmth, and then relapsed into his customary taciturnity. Sarah and Frank had their usual affectionate quarrel. The supper was just what Fremont would have come out from Monterey to eat, if he had felt like eating. Even as it was, the new-made sausage, the volcano of mashed potato with its discharge of melted-butter lava from its crater, the delicious bread, the inch-thick pumpkin pie, the roll jelly-cake, and all the rest of it did not go quite undiscussed of Fremont; but Kate McConkey was not deceived by her son's statement implying that all was well with him, and that he "just came out." She would have felt a sense of wrongness in his very atmosphere, even if his eyes and mouth had not told her.

The tired men went to bed; Sarah withdrew, knowing that her brother desired a talk with her mother.

"Well, my boy," she said, "what is it?"

"May has gone off and married Paul Holbrook," said Fremont.

"She has!" This was followed by a long pause on Mrs. McConkey's part. "Well, I know you think pretty small of him, but she's been in love with him for a long time, if I know what signs mean; an' you may misjudge him. It looks as if she'd done purty well, Freem. I hope they'll be happy. She's as nice a girl as even a Holbrook could ask for. I should think he'd be proud of her. I thought once he was thinkin' of Cathie—an' maybe he was; but nobody could take her away from Winnie's babies. Well, I wish 'em much joy. It makes a big difference to you an' Cathie though. I wonder——"

She ceased in the midst of her wonder, and for a long time they sat in silence.

"Have you thought," said she, "of what your plans are goin' to be—sence this happened?"

"I guess Owen and I can do the work in the office," said Fremont. "And there are others we can get to take May's place."

He was shying from the confrontation of his basic problem; and his mother did not appear to think this remark worthy of any reply.

"I can hardly hope," said he, "to be renominated to my present office, after all this scandal Paul Holbrook has made; though according to all the rules of the game, I'm entitled to it. I have been expecting it—until lately. I—lots of the men of influence think I can get the nomination. I often wish I was clean out of it. If I had any prospects outside of politics, I'd tell them to take the office and throw it in the pond! But the girls and I have impoverished ourselves to pay the captain's debts, and Raws

Upright says he can't pay anything. I'll go out of the office with nothing but the bare right to practise law, no practise—and so little money that it isn't worth speaking of. But I am not so very much cast down about that, ma. As you used to say, 'I've never starved a winter yet.' I'll find some way of providing for Cathie and the babies, ma. I'm not much good if I can't, am I?"

Mrs. McConkey sat for a long time looking at Fremont with an expression of yearning and pity on her face. He was, after all, such a little boy!

"You hain't talked to Cathie about this?"

"No, I thought I'd like to see you, first."

Mrs. McConkey laid her hand on his. This meant in McConkeyese, "Thank you, my son; and God bless you!" Fremont's pressure of her toil-worn hand and his suffused eyes were the family outburst of thanks for her sympathy.

"Of course," said she presently, "you have took into consideration that Cathie is a young woman, an' after all the young ones ain't hern, and that she'll naturally have other plans for herself sometime, further'n to spend her life raisin' your babies. You can't expect her to give all her young life to you an' them."

"I've dismissed it from my mind long ago. I've just thought of some way of our going on just as we have, with May gone. We'll have to get along without Hilka Schwagermann, too, I'm afraid, after I'm out of office. And we'll have to move into another house, too. You know we've lost the Ashe home. Jim Boyd was going to take it for the captain's debts, and the Holbrooks bought it. I'll never stay in it with a Holbrook for a landlord!"

"Just you and Cathie living together?"

"Yes—we two and the little ones."

"Do you think she'd do that?"

"Why, ma, why not!"

"I wonder what Mrs. Smythe, and the women of the

Ladies' Aid Society, would say about it, Fremont? Just you, an' Cathie, a girl just your age, or a little younger, an' the handsomest girl, in my opinion, in Monterey Centre—just you two livin' together!"

It took Fremont all the time consumed in a long pause to take this in. It was an absurd, but a mightily disturbing thought. It took him several minutes to dispose of it. When he did, he spoke in a tone of high resolve.

"Nobody could say anything worth answering on that line. I'll take chances on that!"

"*You* take chances!" exclaimed Mrs. McConkey. "Good gosh, do you s'pose I was thinkin' about *your* chances! I'm thinkin' of her—the noblest girl I ever had for a friend, and worth a round dozen of that little May! I was thinkin' of little Lorena an' Fernando brought up in the tainted air of the poisoned talk that circulates around every human puscavity that wears skirts—or pants either, for the men are as bad in their smily way as the women—in this county. Every little intimate thing in your household, every affectionate thing that'll take place, that's never be'n noticed in the past, would be wrote down in their books an' commented on. This would go on for years an' years. It would stan' in the way of Catherine's settlin' herself in life. It would drive both of ye into a stubborn stand that it's nobody's business but yourn, or force ye into a bu'st-up, which would come too late. Look at Myra Wilson and Finley Boone. They went on after Hiram Wilson died, an' have kep' the house together, an' brought up Myra's children as respectable as any folks could, an' for my part, I respect both of 'em just as much as I do any one, but I don't go there, nor allow Sarah to neighbor with Addie Wilson. It's a blight on the house—this poison-talk. I foresee that it will be the same with you and Cathie and the children if you carry out this plan of yourn, that you think Cathie would be noble and generous enough to agree to. An' I guess she

would! She'd never think maybe, for there ain't an evil thought in her head. She'd go through fire for the babies. But this thing won't do."

Fremont was silenced by this argument. He thought of the vile seepage of gossip which had pervaded the neighborhood regarding the Wilson-Boone household, and how Addie Wilson had taken up with some of the Bushyager young people because of her isolation through this blot in the family's 'scutcheon. But what a sacrilege to apply such a case to that of Catherine and himself! Why, under the common law, with which he was then much more familiar than he was ever again, a man could be punished criminally for marrying his deceased wife's sister—he had read it in Blackstone only the other day, and there was always an agitation in Britain for the changing of the law so as to permit such marriages. Logic here showed its loathsome head; why this agitation, unless there were many people who believed that such marriages were proper? And Fremont knew the penalties in the form of public opinion in his community when two people, man and woman, between whom marriage was proper, lived together without it. Why had he never thought of this before? And how could he live and rear his children without that dear and devoted girl? His mother answered the question she had raised.

"You'll find when you go home," said she, "that Cathie will have other plans for the future."

"I don't know what they can be," protested Fremont. "I think she'd die rather than give up the babies—Winnie's babies that were given to her with their mother's dying breath!"

"May will want her to come an' live with her," said Mrs. McConkey. "Maybe she and Paul will ask her to bring the children, too."

"Never!" exclaimed Fremont. "My children under his roof? Never!"

"Well," said his mother, after some consideration, "I do' know 's I blame you for feelin' that way. I do myself. An' it ain't as if there was no other way out. We can't give the little ones the chance they'd have in town, but for a few years they might do better out here than they would cooped up there. When Winnie passed away, I told you I'd be glad to care for the little ones. I'll be glad to do it now. I raised four that I ain't ashamed of. As long as Sarah's with me we can tangle with 'em all right; an' they'll be easier to care for in a few months, when Fernando's a little older. After you talk with Catherine, you'll want to bring 'em here, my boy; an' you tell her we'll take 'em and be glad we can."

"She never'll consent to part with them," said Fremont. "And, ma, I can't think of not seeing them every day myself. You are mighty good to make the offer—and I might have known you would; but Catherine would never do it. I won't do it myself. We'll find a way somehow, ma. We'll find a way!"

"I don't see what it can be," said Mrs. McConkey.

Fremont drove home the next day in a still cool atmosphere, pondering over the new problems which his mother had shown him as demanding solution. He was so engrossed with them that only occasionally did he think that on the day after to-morrow May and Paul would be back in Monterey, and that Paul would make his long-delayed effort to blow the County Ring out of water by his injunction suit. Fremont would be in the court room that day, but felt sure that the bomb would not explode with any ruinous effect. Chiefly, though, he was thinking not of the humiliation which had taken him out-of-town the day before, not of May, but of Catherine and the babies. That he might have to part with Catherine had not occurred to him. He now realized that she had become so integral a part of

his life that he had never even thought of any parting with her. Yet, the arguments of his mother impressed themselves upon his mind more and more strongly as he turned them over in his thoughts. His mother would not be mistaken in such a matter. Then his blunder was so serious as to seem almost fatal to him.

Passages from his favorite poet rang through his mind—that cry of Sir Bedivere to King Arthur:

> "But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
> Which was an image of the mighty world:
> And I, the last, go forth companionless,
> And the days darken round me, and the years
> Among new men, strange faces, other minds!"

"Other minds!" And Catherine had always had the mind which understood what he was about, which saw his point of view, which detected the weakness in what he planned or did—which seemed to see him as his mother saw him, as a boy yet, with all a boy's enthusiasms and blindnesses. That was why, he told himself, he had learned to lean so much on Catherine—that, quite as much as her sweet and loving mothering of his children.

> "The sequel of this day unsolders all
> The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
> Whereof this world holds record. . . . I think that we
> Shall never more at any time
> Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds. . . .
> I am so deeply smitten through the helm
> That without help I can not last till morn!"

Their little fireside group was the Round Table—and he had broken it. But what help was there for him, he asked himself, as the beauty of the lines, quite as much as his anxiety of spirit, brought the tears to his eyes. No help,

he answered, unless Catherine knew the way through, where his mother's judgment was at fault. And if any one could see more clearly than his mother, it was Catherine. So thought Fremont as he drove into the alley and put out his horse.

CHAPTER IV

IF IT WERE DONE WHEN 'TIS DONE

THE midday meal was in process of being placed on the table by their German girl, Hilka Schwagermann, as Fremont went in through the back door. Standing in the sitting-room, with Lorena clinging to her skirts, was Catherine, her face pale, her hands trembling as she stretched them out to him, as if to pledge to him her fidelity in the new trouble. He had heard the front door close behind some departing person as he came in, and knew that some one—it had been Mrs. Smythe—had hurried away to avoid meeting him. He took Catherine's hands and pressed them warmly.

"I hope," said he, "that this has not upset you too much, Catherine. After all, while it is rather sudden, it is not a thing which, except in the manner of it, we have any good reason to be astonished at. I was astonished, and went out home to get myself together, and to think, after talking to ma about it. Let's meet it calmly, and try to deal with it wisely, Cathie."

She looked relieved at this wise-sounding speech, so surprising a deliverance from Fremont. She had expected his poetic nature to be in a tempest of protest.

"Yes," she said, "we'll talk it over, when you have had your dinner. Do you have to go to the office at once?"

Why, it seemed as if they were discussing some every-day matter! Fremont and Catherine sat opposite each other,

with Lorena in her high chair, almost in their usual attitudes. So important is conduct and manner, that they grew steadier in their souls, merely by seeming so. When the meal was over, Catherine put the child down on the carpet to play, and she and Fremont confronted each other in silence.

"Why did you go to see your mother," said Catherine at last, "before talking with me?"

"I wanted to be alone, first," replied Fremont, "so as to be free to think. The drive out home gave me what I wanted. And I didn't care to see any one in Monterey for a while. I—I didn't feel that I had anything to say to any one, as yet; and ma has always had some way out to suggest whenever I was penned up, and hemmed in. I didn't think you'd feel it as a slight if I went. I—I really didn't want to talk with you yet. Don't you see?"

She didn't quite see; for she was still ignorant of May's reason for what really amounted to a flight; but she thought she saw.

"What did your mother say?" she asked.

"She said that when I had talked with you, I would find that you will see the necessity of some change in our—our way of living—now that May is gone."

He had felt that it would be impossible to explain this matter to Catherine. He could hardly bring himself to hint it in this way. It seemed to degrade the dear girl. He flushed a little as he spoke—a flush of mingled embarrassment and indignation.

"I know," said Catherine. "Plenty of good friends have been telling me! Mrs. Smythe has just gone. She came to discharge a duty to me—me an innocent girl! They all agree that you and I can not go on living together, caring for these babies, doing our duty to Winnie's babies, and your babies and *my* babies, unless we keep some older woman in the house as a chaperon—which we can't do, or unless

we are married ourselves! My reputation would suffer. She did not say anything about yours! As if I cared for reputation as against the welfare of the children, and the right to be with them, and love them, and watch them grow and feel them loving me and clinging to me. The littleness of it, Fremont! What did your mother say?"

"She said the same thing."

"My God!" exclaimed Catherine. "Haven't I a friend in the world? What have I done to be deserted like this! What do you think, Fremont! What do you think! Are you against me, too?"

She gathered Lorena to her bosom, and bending over the sleeping babe in the crib, kissed his little hand, his flaxen curls, his plump little foot. Then she stood awaiting his answer like a mother in some captured city awaiting the ravaging foe with her babes around her.

"I against you! You know I couldn't be that, Cathie!" exclaimed Fremont. "And yet, there is a good deal of force to what these people say, Catherine. We must think, not only of ourselves, but of the children as they grow up."

"You are against me, too!" she cried.

"No, I am not against you!" protested Fremont. "But we promised each other we would consider this thing calmly. Try to be calm, Catherine, while I tell you what I think we should consider!"

She sat by the crib with her hand on the baby's arm and with Lorena pressed to her bosom, as Fremont told her what his mother had said; of the case of Myra Wilson and Finley Boone, and of how Addie Wilson had been smirched by the mode of life which her mother had adopted.

"I want to think of this," said Fremont. "I want you to think of it. I have resolved more firmly than ever, to live henceforth for these babies, and for the memory of my lost Winifred. I shall never deviate from fidelity to her or to them. She is alive to me to-day just as she was when I

had her with me. My great love is embodied in her memory. She lives in her children. Whatever is best for them, you and I must do, Cathie."

This excursion into the subject of his consecration to the memory of his lost wife might have surprised Catherine as it would have startled him day before yesterday—before he had felt that feeling of mingled shame and relief at May's rejection of his proposal. He stated it because it was in his mind. Catherine was not surprised at it; it seemed to her a thing which was pertinent to the case before them.

"Yes," said she, "I know how you feel, I think. I think I have always known it. What else did your mother say?"

"She said," replied Fremont, "that she would be glad to take these babies and care for them, if you felt, as she expected, that you would desire to go to live with May."

"I thought she was my friend," moaned Catherine. "She is against me, too. May asks me to bring the children to her. She, too, will not consider our living together for the children!"

"That is a thing," said Fremont, looking straight at Catherine, "that I can not consider for a moment. It would mean that I could not see them—that I should lose them! No!"

"Do you believe," asked Catherine, "that Winnie sees her children, and cares for them, and yearns over them?"

This was too complex a problem for Fremont, and he did not reply.

"Then," said Catherine, as if he had assented, "tell me this! What would be her agony to see her babies she gave to me, when they were so little and in need of care and love, given to another woman, no matter how good and loving she might be? And what would she say to the cruelty of robbing me of them, after they have crept into the very heart of my heart until I shall die if I can not have them? Tell me that, Fremont!"

"And what would she feel if they were taken from me," exclaimed Fremont; "and put where they would be under the influence of a man who thinks their father a thief!"

"Neither plan will do!" exclaimed Catherine. "Fremont, God has given these precious little ones to you and me to nurse and care for and love, to us—together! Nothing else matters! There must be some way out!"

"What way is there?" asked Fremont. "What way?"

"That," said Catherine, "is for you to say."

Little Fernando awoke and cried for his food. Catherine took him up, brooded over him, her face the image of maternal love; and finally quieted him in his little crib. Then she took Lorena on her lap and hushed her to sleep. This may have taken a long time, but Fremont had lost all sense of duration. He was facing another crisis. When Catherine had laid the little girl down for her nap, she returned and faced him.

"When you say," said he, "that the thing for us to do is for me to say, you must not misunderstand if I return to what society—that damnable thing!—may say. If we are to be guided by what others think——"

"But it was you," said Catherine, "that spoke of Mrs. Wilson and Mr. Boone—and their little girl."

"You mentioned what Mrs. Smythe said about the only way for us to do if we are to live together with these dear babies," returned Fremont. "Mrs. Smythe is society, isn't she?"

Catherine bowed her head in assent.

"I have told you how I feel about marriage," said he. "And I know that you have no feeling toward me but that of a sister. Before we go further, I must tell you something which you will wonder at, after hearing what I have just said—that I can never think again of being a husband to any woman—that I have had my great love—that I shall always feel to you a deeper affection than for any other

woman except my mother, and that we can never be to each other anything except what we have been in the past."

"That," said Catherine, "is what I should have expected of you—always the best of brothers, and nothing more!"

"But I have a confession to make, Catherine. I shall propose something presently, if you are willing to have me to do it, which is of such importance to us both that I want the record between us clean of all deceit and suppression. I am the one to blame for May's leaving us!"

I think he made as clean a breast of it as was possible. He told of his repugnance to May's marriage to Paul Holbrook, calling himself an idiot for not suspecting that May loved Paul, and laying before Catherine his past troubles with the notion that May was about to sacrifice herself in order that her future should not be a burden to him, Fremont. He did not spare himself the suspicion that for a moment he almost made himself believe that he wanted May for his wife. He knew now that this was a state of mind into which he had drawn himself by his own thinking; for when he knew that he was not to be married to May, had he not felt that sense of relief? Anyhow, he had proposed to her. He had kissed her. He had mortally offended her, so that she had felt that she could not live in the same house with him any more. He had driven her to Paul Holbrook. He was responsible for their present crisis.

"Now you know all," said he. "Does it make any difference between us? Shall I go on?"

Catherine sat for a while looking away from him.

"Are you sure," said she at last, "that you do not love May?"

"Perfectly sure," said Fremont. "I can never love any woman again in that way, or be a husband to any woman."

"Are you sure of that, too?" asked Catherine.

"Perfectly sure," said Fremont.

"That makes it all the better, then," said Catherine. "Go on, Fremont!"

"I want to say first," said he, "how touched I am at your love for these babies of mine. My mother said you are the noblest woman she ever knew. I can say the same. You are not a woman—you are Woman! You give up everything, if you say you agree to what I shall propose. I give up nothing, I gain everything. If, for the sake of the welfare of these babies, for the sake of your love for them, for the sake of giving them a father's care as well as a mother's, you are willing to go through the form of marriage with me, with the understanding that I shall never presume to think of it as anything but a means for the perpetuation between us of the relations of brother and sister, if for these considerations you are willing to give up the thought of marriage for yourself, why then, I propose we do as Mrs. Smythe says we should do! If you are not, then forget that as unworthy a one as I ever dreamed of such a thing!"

"Fremont," said Catherine, taking his hand, "it is all right for you to take all this responsibility; but you know that this is what I have been trying to say ever since we began!"

They laughed together at Catherine's speech. It was a familiar allusion to a humorous old folk-tale, which you have probably never heard; and they laughed merrily at it. What they had agreed upon seemed so obviously the right thing, the inevitable thing! Why, how was it that May or Mrs. McConkey never thought of this plain way out, this simple method of going through the form of marriage, so that they could go on living their own life, the good life in which Winifred and the captain and May had left them! And to think of that officious snippy little Mrs. Smythe being the one to put them on the right path! They forgot that it

took an officious, snippy person to do such a thing. Their spirits rose.

"Well, shake hands on it!" exclaimed Fremont, extending his hand.

"I solemnly swear——," said Catherine, taking his hand, "how does it go?"

"According to the statute in such cases made and provided will do," said Fremont. "But doesn't another quotation furnish our best guide? 'If 'twere done, then 'twere well it were done quickly'? When shall we do this?"

"Well," said Catherine, "your office is still open, and you will have to issue yourself a license, won't you? And on the way, can't you see a magistrate, or a minister, and have him come here this evening? My trousseau is all ready. We'll dispense with ushers and bridesmaids. By eight o'clock little Fernando and Lorena will be asleep. That will be the time."

"All right," said Fremont, and went light-heartedly up the street to the court-house where, in his official capacity as clerk of the courts, he issued to himself in his individual capacity a license for Fremont McConkey to wed Catherine Ashe. In his individual capacity he paid to himself in his official capacity, the legal fee, and took the document over to Owen Gowdy for his signature.

"I think we'll ask you to put the clerk's official signature on this," said he, shoving it under Owen's nose. "I don't care to appear in too many characters."

Owen read it with amazement. He signed it, "Fremont McConkey, Clerk of the District Court, by O. L. Gowdy, Deputy," rose, and handed it to Fremont.

"Fremont," said he, "I congratulate you! You have drawn the big prize in the matrimonial lottery! I wish you much joy!"

"Thanks!" replied Fremont, much as if he had been

congratulated on a new hat. "If you're not otherwise engaged, come around to the house at about eight this evening. And please don't publish this. It's going to be very quiet."

There was something else, wasn't there? Oh, yes—the minister! He went out of the court-house with the license in his pocket, walked toward the Baptist parsonage, and then remembered that the pastor was not in town. Also that he was just passing the little new Unitarian Church which most people looked upon as a thing of shame mingled with danger, and which the very small boys in the street had learned to call ironically, "The Fire Insurance Office." The pastor, Mr. Snook, had a library in the rear, and might be in. Fremont tapped at the door. Mr. Snook was in. He would be glad to perform the ceremony. Had Mr. McConkey procured that necessary prerequisite, the license? Very well then—eight o'clock this evening! All very much in the day's work.

His Sunday suit with its shirt and collar and the white tie he had worn were laid out on his bed, and by it, a plain gold ring. Thoughtful Catherine! She never forgot anything! On the little slip of paper in her scrawly handwriting were the words. "My mother's wedding ring. How strange that it should be given me again by her little Neatherd!" Fremont thought of those bales of *New York Ledgers,* and of the hole in his trousers through which little May had noted how white his skin was. He dressed for dinner. He and Catherine were alone. Hilka, who came in the morning and went home in the evening, had gone earlier than usual. The meal passed almost in silence, save for the bare details of his preparations for the ceremony, and Catherine's statement that she had asked the Smythes to come in. She did not explain to him that she desired to bind Mrs. Smythe to her with such hoops of steel as possible, concerning that conference of this morning, which

the banker's lady might regard as having been a controlling factor in this impromptu marriage. Fremont was, as a politician,—if he had any claim on the title,—of the opinion that the participation of the Smythes might not be a bad thing. The Smythes were the other wing of the great Holbrook power in the community. It was rather a solemn function, that marriage supper.

Mrs. Smythe always insisted that it seemed more like a funeral than a wedding. It was delayed a little because little Fernando awoke and cried, and the bride had to quiet him. The bride had seen to it that as many of the conventions were observed as was humanly possible. The ring, the Sunday clothes, the Smythes, Owen Gowdy—all these were provided by her, or fitted into her plans. The whole affair was a mere compliance to form. If little Fernando injected an unwedding-like element into the proceedings, he was not to be blamed, and she forgave him with a kiss; and entered the room on the arm of Wilbur Smythe with a dignity that matched the pallor of her face, but was not at all bride-like, met Fremont, with whom Owen Gowdy "stood up" under the chandelier of kerosene lamps and, in a white dress, with a bouquet of white roses which Mrs. Smythe had brought her, Catherine looked very dignifiedly beautiful to Owen Gowdy, as she promised to love, honor and obey her pale and impassive bridegroom—who never noticed how sweet she looked, until after he had betsowed his formal kiss upon her, the people had departed, and they sat quietly together—across the table from each other, it must be admitted, making up for their lack of recent meals.

"Well," said she, "it's over!"

"I want to tell you again," said Fremont, "that if I don't make a success of what's begun here, it will not be for lack of effort on my part, Cathie."

"We'll make a success, never fear, Fremont," said she. "I think it went off better than one might have expected.

The nearer we could come to making it conventional, you know, the less chance there was for talk. You looked and behaved very nice, Fremont!"

"And you were beautiful," Fremont assured her.

She slept with Lorena in her arms, very quiet in spirit, enjoying the first undisturbed slumber since the peril of losing her babies had appeared to terrify her. She was happy. As for Fremont, his conscience was troubled. If you think the trouble was about May, or the memory of Winnie, or related to this new relation to Catherine, with all its dynamic possibilities, you do not yet know Fremont McConkey. His conscience had been uneasy ever since he had quoted Shakespeare to Catherine. It had seemed wrong when he uttered it; and now as he dropped asleep, he remembered exactly what Macbeth had said. It was not, as he had given it to Catherine, an authority in favor of their marriage at once. It ran thus:

> "If it were done *when 'tis done,* then 'twere well
> It were done quickly!"

He rose to a sitting posture in bed. This was quite another text from the one he had quoted. "If it were done when 'tis done!" Why, that text was an authority against doing it at all! It meant that the act was one charged with Fate—with Doom! A literary conscience is sometimes a bad thing for repose.

CHAPTER V

FREMONT QUITS

THE practically simultaneous weddings of the Ashe sisters to the two most prominent young men of Monterey, and to the two youths who were bitterest in their enmity toward each other, was the sensation of the hour. It was, in fact, the sensation of twenty-four hours, or maybe thirty-six; and then it was drowned out by the noise of the explosion in the county cases. Paul Holbrook came back from his little wedding tour, installed May in her father-in-law's palatial home (it is a cheap lodging-house now), walked into the court room, faced Judge Wendell, and fired his torpedo—which was to blow the County Ring out of water, tie up all the bales of county warrants in the Monterey State Bank, and by its repercussions in other cases, remove from office, not only every member of the Board of Supervisors, but also the sheriff, the auditor and the treasurer. It might also put some of them behind the bars; and with them some gentlemen who had served in the past, including that frank friend of ours, Mr. Roswell Upright.

Fremont McConkey, a member of the Ring, was in attendance as clerk of the court, sitting behind his counter, with his pigeonholes for the legal papers behind him. His eyes did not meet those of his new brother-in-law. His behavior was most correct; but he looked out over the great crowd brought there by the celebrated cause, saw Paul Hol-

brook alone against a large group of legal lights led by N. V. Creede, who had been retained by the Bank of Monterey, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the favor he had seemed once to show to the Citizens' Committee, saw every man who was then, or had been in the past, or expected to be in the future, interested in county or state politics—Judge Stone, his old enemy Governor Wade, influential farmers like Magnus Thorkelson and J. T. Vandemark, the young man who was in the field to be Fremont's successor—saw them all sitting, looking with keen curiosity mingled with various and differing other passions, at the young man with the silver-rimmed glasses, who was firing the torpedo; and Fremont felt inclined to chuckle a little in advance at the spectacle of Paul Holbrook squelched by N. V. Creede.

Holbrook—it was a hearing on the granting of a temporary injunction—began reading to the court his proof in the form of affidavits. There was the usual sparring of opposition in the form of objections, the usual delays; but Judge Wendell made it clear that he was desirous of hearing what the young man had to offer, and soon the sound of Holbrook's voice, as he read page after page of affidavits, interrupted only by explanatory remarks or interrogations of the court, began to put to sleep those spectators who are always present in court with no interest in what goes on.

But Fremont McConkey did not sleep. He saw the drama in the facts laid before the court; he saw it reflected in the faces of the men before him. He saw the keen intelligent face of James Boyd flush with passion as Paul read the statement of a man who had at the request of a county supervisor, put in duplicate bills for making approaches to bridges, one bill in each case against the bridge-fund for the supervisor and another against the road-fund for himself. The anger was caused by the fact that Mr. Boyd had the warrants, issued for those fraudulent bills, in his vaults that day. Fremont saw the county super-

visor implicated turn pale. Joe Zentz, the treasurer, laughed—but it was a rather ghastly laugh—when Paul showed that he personally was getting half of the two per cent. of illegal and excessive interest he was paying Boyd's bank for "carrying" the county debt "pending arrangements for bonding."

As the evidence prosily flowed in, a spectator at almost any time might have thought that nothing vital was taking place; but gradually Fremont McConkey, as he fitted these facts into the mass of things within his personal knowledge, grew sick at the feeling that all these things which Paul Holbrook was pressing upon the intelligence and conscience of the court, were true. He saw, too, that the defendants—the bank and the county officers—knew that they were true. Not one of them but was the picture of surprised guilt—not one except Raws Upright, who sat with an expression of rather pleased interest on his face, looking very much as a man engaged in some game may look when his opponent makes a beautiful score against him.

Upright smiled broadly with the rest, when Jacob Cohen, the first of the Hebrew invaders of the village, grew almost apoplectic when it was shown that his bills for blankets and clothing for paupers and prisoners had been held over for session after session of the Board of Supervisors, and finally allowed not only as a whole, but that each separate bill had been allowed which made up the whole, and paid to Albert Junkins' deputy on an order which Jacob had signed as the deputy had said, "To save Mr. Cohen the trouble of going over to the court-house."

"Vy," said he when he grew articulate, "do you suppose, now, yer Honor, I'd ever haf a bill paid t'ree times ofer, like dot hundred seventeen fifty for dem blankets, an' me not git my share? Dis iss gorruption, yer Honor, unless I git my rake-off!"

Uncle Jake Vandemark half rose in his seat when it was

shown that the supervisor having charge of road work in his part of the county had drawn thousands of dollars in the name of one of Uncle Jake's hired men, "to be expended on the roads of Vandemark Township"—and Fremont knew as well as did Mr. Vandemark that not a tithe of it had ever been so expended. This system of what is coming to be called "graft" now, but termed "boodle" then, was spread in layer after layer over the whole county.

Charlie Fleming was shown to have charged the county separately railway fare and subsistence for himself and each of the prisoners taken to the penitentiary, though it was proved not only that he took more than one at a trip, but that each time he and they traveled on passes issued to him by the railways. It was shown that the costs of the county jail had been multiplied by padding, and that nearly all the officers involved had their own grocery, and, in some cases, their dry-goods and clothing, bills charged to the account of the prisoners and the few paupers of the county. Charlie, too, had filched thousands from the public on fraudulent claims for fees, transportation and subsistence of witnesses supposed to have appeared before the various grand juries.

"You will note, your Honor," said Paul Holbrook, in discussing this phase of the matter, "that the detective genius of our sheriff, Mr. Fleming, is more extraordinary than any ever imagined by Poe. He scents evidence afar off. The farther off it is, in fact, the better he seems to scent it. I have here a list of witnesses for whose transportation Mr. Fleming has generously provided, to appear before our grand juries. The majority are from Maine, California and Oregon. I think your Honor will be justified in inquiring why our witnesses of crime in Monterey County flee before every term of court to Portland, Maine, and Portland, Oregon, and slight Portland, Iowa! And why all of them must have their expenses to Monterey advanced

by Mr. Fleming, why our sheriff signs for all their warrants in his own hand, and why no member of these grand juries remembers that such persons have appeared before their august bodies!"

It was all a mass of rottenness! Fremont blushed to think that he had been befooled and deceived by these clumsy scoundrels for so long. He found no excuses for himself, though other people in time found them in plenty. In time, the public came to see, as some of his friends then saw, that he had been as an ignorant farmer boy, drawn into the unsavory mess of local politics, not only when it was not known to be so filled with vileness, but at a time when he himself was incapable of seeing its seamy side, and at a time when he was devoid of experience and without any political standards—when, in fact, the community was so new and so lacking in social cohesiveness as to be itself lacking in standards.

He came afterward to look upon the misdoings of the guilty men themselves, with much more charity than he felt that evening. They were also victims of a system, or a lack of it. When the country was new, most of the lands had been owned by non-resident speculators, to whom nobody felt that anything was due by way of fidelity or duty. The settlers believed that they were working to build up the country for the benefit of these outsiders, these capitalists. The taxes paid by the non-residents seemed to possess nothing in the way of sacredness. Counties were organized for the express purpose of producing taxes for the benefit of their organizers. All over the newer portions of the state there were these county rings through whose operations were laid the foundations of the fortunes of many of our old and respectable families—among them the Holbrooks of Monterey. How could one condemn a mushroom for growing up in a bed specially prepared for mushrooms? Jim Boyd, Charlie Fleming, Albert Junkins, Joe

Zentz and the crooked fools of the County Board were merely mushrooms growing in the bed the laws had prepared for them. Captain Ashe had been a similar mushroom, and had it not been for that accidental discharge of the gun as he pulled it through the wire fence, the captain would now have been on the Paul Holbrook rack.

Finally, as Fremont grew older, he realized that the American county government, even after the communities became settled, is a natural bed for the growth of the mushroom of inefficiency and crookedness. It has no head, no center of responsibility, no executive. When the work now nearly finished entitled, *A Study of County Government,* by Fremont McConkey, finds a publisher, the way out as he sees it, will be indicated. The way will be pointed out to save our people from graft and inefficiency, and to preserve weak men like so many of our county officers, from irresistible temptation—a way based on the denial of Pope's foolish line which runs, "Whatever's best administered is best."

Some systems can not be properly administered. Our system of county government can not. Mr. McConkey proposes that the county be governed by a board which merely legislates, and that their legislation be executed by a single commissioner hired wherever he may be found, who shall be responsible for everything—a commission form of government for counties.

This elevation of view came afterward—years afterward. That night, he was not only humbled, but humiliated, shamed. He felt disgraced, and as a matter of fact, he was disgraced. In his office, after court adjourned, he found two men waiting for him. As they rose, he recognized them as his old friends of his "neatherd" days, Bent Bushyager, and that smooth old bandit, Mark Owsley.

"We come in," said Bent, "to talk with you about the caucuses that's comin' on right soon now."

"Well," answered Fremont, flicked on the raw by this reference to politics, "what about the caucuses?"

"We've got things ribbed up," replied Bent, "to bring in the Crescent Township delegation f'r you."

"What for?" asked Fremont. "If I were nominated for scavenger, I couldn't be elected. This whole county crowd will be turned out of office when the people learn what's been done up-stairs to-day. They ought to be. Men that the people have been supporting year after year will be lucky if they don't go to jail! I tell you, Bent, men that'll do what seems to be proved on this crowd, will steal acorns from a blind sow! I'm through with 'em. I'm through with all of it! Thank you for your offer of the Crescent delegation; but I quit when my term expires. Tell all my friends so, if I have any friends left—which I doubt! Except, you! I'm done—and if I thought I wasn't, the people would soon show me that I am!"

Fremont took no pains to lower his voice to the political conference modulations. He spoke out, loudly and plainly; but he was sorry afterward, as he saw that Paul Holbrook, who had come for some papers, must have heard him as he stood at the desk. Fremont had no desire to bestow any encomiums on Paul, who, after carrying off Fremont's pretty sister-in-law in triumph, had just had the greatest day of his life in court. It had been Paul's day. He had driven them before him! N. V. Creede, when Paul had completed the presentation of his affidavits, rose and sarcastically remarked that he would not be so ungenerous as to deprive his young friend of his glory on that occasion, but would merely remind him and the court that in this country, thank God! no man's reputation, not to say his liberty, and the functions entrusted to him by an appreciative people, could be taken from him by *ex parte* evidence, cooked up in secret, and Mr. Creede would only ask the court to withhold action on the application until his clients could have

their day in court, and show up these slanderers for what they were.

"The court will appoint one week from to-day," said Judge Wendell, "for the defendants to show cause why the temporary injunction, which I shall grant on the plaintiff's showing, shall not be maintained in force until the final hearing on its permanency."

There was a sharp struggle over this, but the court was firm. He should grant the temporary injunction.

"And I take this occasion," said he, "to notify all parties that I shall assign for trial the cases for the removal of these men from office at an early day of the next term! Mr. Bailiff, adjourn court!"

The judge was against the court-house crowd! Fremont had this in mind when he announced his defection to Bent Bushyager and Deek Owsley. Mr. Owsley rubbed his hands in approval. He, it may be remembered, had always felt that Fremont had better things in prospect than to be clerk of the courts—things more important to his rather questionable friends in Crescent Township.

"I think you're right," said Deek Owsley. "It's time you cut loose from this crowd of petty thieves! But you're wrong when you say you've got no friends. You've got lots of 'em! Why, half your farmer supporters won't hear of this thing till after thrashin', an' most of them'll stay by you. But don't you fool with this two-by-nine office, Mr. McConkey. We can start a boom for you for a better place. What you ought to do is to be a Reform candidate for sheriff!"

Fremont laughed sarcastically at this. Owsley seemed obsessed with the notion that Fremont ought to be made sheriff. He locked his office, and went home, taking the main street and walking erect—but speaking to nobody unless spoken to. He was surprised that his downfall seemed to make so little difference with the greetings he

received. Probably they had not heard. Catherine had not learned of what had taken place; and he broke it to her gently at supper.

"And," she anxiously inquired, "did papa's name come up?"

"No," said Fremont. "Not in any way."

"May and I," said she, smiling on him, "owe that to you!"

"No," said he. "You owe it to May's salary, and your economy, and to your willingness to give up your home!"

"But that was a matter of course," said Catherine. "I know, and May knows!"

That night they heard a tapping, not at the front door, but at the back. Catherine went to the door, and admitted Mr. Roswell Upright through the kitchen.

"Sneaked in through the back alley," said Raws, after Catherine had withdrawn. "Criminal, and all that, you know. Stormy day!"

"In some ways," answered Fremont.

"I heard what you said to that Crescent Township delegation," said Raws. "I don't blame yeh! They've got nothing on you. And I think you'd better go after the nomination ag'in. I talked with Jake Vandemark an' Magnus after court adjourned, and they're fer yeh. They'd got what you said to your horse-thief friends. The other officers are sore at yeh, but they'll be too dam' busy to hurt yeh much. I think you can rope in both sides, Freem. I was tickled at what Uncle Jake said. He an' Magnus found me posting up a notice of a meetin' of the Anti-Horse-Thief Association I'm president of, an' I said we'd got to clean these thieves up sometime—that's a good issue for me when this thing blows over—and Magnus said, 'Vell, Raws, from what Ay hare, not all our t'ieves are horse-t'ieves!' 'Oh,' says I, 'don't decide on one side of the evidence. They hain't all thieves around the court-house!' 'Darned near it!' says

Jake. 'If it wan't for Fremont McConkey, I'd say they all was, an' every man that's be'n in office in this county!' 'Wal,' says I, 'yeh know me, Jake. I never claimed to be out fer nothin' but my health!' But don't you see, Freem, you've got these pure-minded fellers with yeh yet, a lot of 'em. An' you've had only two years, an' the other chap hain't no organization—an' I'd kind o' like to have it to say afterward that we didn't git quite cleaned out. Better stick, Freem!'"

"No," said Fremont. "And while we're talking I want you to pay that note of yours. Catherine an' I will need that money."

"Well, Freem," said Raws, "if I had the money, an' I wouldn't give a dam' whose money it was I had, I'd pay you! But them railroad fellers trimmed me proper on my contracts; they made me do the work the way I agreed, by George. I don't see how I can pay anything on it; but here's what I've been thinkin'! You've a kind of a hankerin' fer newspaperin'. I own the *Lithopolis Sun*, kind of under cover. Wanted to keep it goin' when Smith was peterin' out, f'r political reasons. He'll turn it over to me, or any one I say, anytime, an' he'll stay a while an' get you started. He's got a line o' fire an' life insurance companies, an' you can put an attorney-at-law sign at the top. They need a good lawyer in Lithopolis. Ain't none at all there now. An' you've got all the people there on your staff. I'll turn the whole thing over to you for an endorsement of a thousand dollars on that note."

Fremont laughed. The idea of becoming the editor of a village weekly, after all his lofty plans for literary success, was very absurd. But Raws made a good selling talk. What was Fremont going to do? Here was a living, anyhow, and a chance to start in with his law practise.

"Well," said Fremont, in order to close the interview, "if you won't say any more about my being a candidate

for clerk of the courts, I'll consider it. I'll talk to my—my wife about it."

The word came with difficulty. It was his first use of it as to Catherine. And when he spoke to her about the Lithopolis project, she rather favored it. She said that she felt as if she would like to leave Monterey. Living in a smaller way in the town would not be unpleasant. She liked Lithopolis, because it was so pretty. And in short, she turned Fremont's mind, so that from lack of choice, perhaps, the removal was made.

They both looked forward to new surroundings and a new life, a life freed from the public problems, which Fremont felt he had bogged down upon hopelessly, as a sort of liberation from a kind of sordid servitude. Fremont told Catherine that he was living a shameful existence. He insisted that the brand of Cain, or anyhow, Benedict Arnold, was upon his brow. She laughed at him in a way which meant both understanding and protest, as he quoted as applying to him, that wonderful speech of Guinivere, as she lay with her face in the dust in the holy house at Almesbury:

> " 'The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months
> The months will add themselves to make the years,
> The years will roll in the centuries,
> And mine will ever be a name of scorn!'

"But after all," he added, having considered it maturely, "the king of every passion, including shame, is Shakespeare. Compare Tennyson's beautiful lines with the couplet from Othello:

> " 'A fixed figure for the time of scorn
> To point his slow unmoving finger at!'

To have conjured up such a tremendous image of utter rejection of all men! To put it in so small a compass that the world *must* remember it—the outcast seeking the caves and forests to hide in—and that awful figure of Time and Scorn with the unmoving finger pointing, pointing, pointing eternally and the disdainful eye looking unwinkingly over it at the crushed miscreant! Why, Shakespeare tells in a phrase more than any one else on a page. That's why we know that when he was made, they broke the molds!"

It pleased Catherine, this outburst. She went about her preparations for Lithopolis quite happily; for since Fremont could get more pleasure out of his literary discovery of this jewel of condemnation, than he found pain in his own eternal disgrace, she had hopes for his complete recovery.

CHAPTER VI

TWO SORTS OF CALIBANS

THEIR life in Lithopolis was rather idyllic in comparison with what they had passed through, and for a while was very happy. Fremont had the most interesting of newspaper plants, even though it was a bit limited. It occupied a one-story building standing with its front flush with the sidewalk on Main Street. They lived in a cottage on the next street north, on a lot which joined back to back to that on which their printing office stood. Smith, their predecessor, had possessed a wife who was fond of flowers; and they had made a trellis running from the back door of the cottage to that of the office, which in season was covered with morning-glory, moon-vine and cypress vine, so that one might pass from the house to the office unseen of the public, and Catherine could in the fine summer weather, spread the table in the shade of their own flowering vines. Here she and the little ones with Fremont and Caliban had many a pleasant collation.

Caliban was the guardian of the place, and the power-plant of the little publishing house. This requires some explanation. Caliban was a huge Danish dog, raised by Smith from a whining puppy with unopened eyes, which had been given him from the door of a baggage car by a member of an *Uncle Tom's Cabin* company. Caliban's mother was on the stage. She took the part of a bloodhound engaged nightly in chasing Eliza over the cakes of ice. She was held by the scruff of the neck when Caliban

passed whimpering into the hands of Smith, and looked backward longingly as the train bore her away. Catherine often said: "Poor old bloodhound!" as she patted Caliban on the head. Nobody but Fremont knew that she was pitying the canine actress robbed of her baby when it was so little and so helpless.

Smith—I never knew of any fuller name for him—could scarcely afford to keep so voracious an animal in idleness, and Mrs. Smith objected to him very strongly; but Surajah Fewkes, who helped about the office at odd times, and who was, as every one in Monterey County knows, a great, or at least a persevering inventor, worked out a way to save himself the labor of turning the press on which the *Sun* was made ready to shine. And this invention gave Surajah Fewkes more honor than anything else he ever got up, save that last great invention, the celebrated Fewkes Farm Gate which he devised after he went to the Poor House, and had time for cerebration. The *Sun* office device was merely a circular platform of boards, set at about the same angle to the horizon as that of the earth's plane of revolution to that of the ecliptic—if I remember accurately—anyhow, it stood slanting, or antigodlin, as Uncle Steve Lawless said; and when the time came for the *Sun* to go to press, Caliban was made to mount this platform, which at once began to revolve so as to place Caliban at the bottom of its circumference. Naturally, Caliban began walking upward, and, the platform being geared or belted to the press, the weight of the dog ran off the edition in one or two tricks. People came for miles to see it. It always made Cathie a little sorry for Caliban, and she accepted his devotion to the household in the capacity of watch-dog as overtime work on his part, and paid him in extra pats, hugs and delicacies. Fremont refused to buy unless Caliban went with the outfit. The dog was the first element of romance in the new life.

The little job press, and the setting of the type, called for the services of a printer, and as most of these men were the so-called tramp printers, the *Sun* and its job department were not seldom inconvenienced by the temporary lack of this skilled man, or by his loss of function through the temptation offered him at Claib Bushyager's saloon a few doors down the street. So Catherine one evening when Fremont was tardy at the meal, spread in what they called "McConkey's Bower" in honor of Mr. Boffin, found him trying to set type and making rather bad weather of it.

"Mighty funny how difficult that little trick is!" said he, as he washed his hands. "But I don't see how we can get along unless I learn it."

"Let's both learn it!" exclaimed Catherine. "I've always wanted to have a trade!"

"You have lots of time for type-setting!" said Fremont ironically.

"But I can get Lyde Fewkes to come and look after the children," said Cathie. "And with me as close as I am to the house, it is perfectly practicable. I'd like the change. Let me try it, anyhow, Fremont."

The result was that as Fremont wrote his editorials and his items of local news, he had before his eyes the figure of Catherine working busily at the cases, making the current tramp printer so much trouble that he threatened to quit—and then staying on and remaining sober, just for the pleasure of enjoying his fair apprentice's smile, and watching her rather stately form as she stole his trade from him. When they joked him down at the saloon as to his devotion to his work, he offered to fight any one that meant anything wrong, and stated that he had his doubts about McConkey's ever making a go of a paper and print shop in this hole in the ground, but if he turned out to be half the man his wife was he'd succeed anywhere, by George—though he may have used a stronger word. The printer, in

short, was respectfully smitten by Catherine's charms, and Fremont was amusedly conscious of that fact.

He watched the affair with a smile—and then he began to say to himself that he did not wonder at it. Cathie was a marvel. She was beginning to dawn on him as something more than a mother to Lorena and Fernando, for whose health and happiness he gave her thanks in his heart each day. How could any man, he said to himself, fail to see how much superior she was to the girls about her—for she was really so young, in spite of her years of responsibility. She was behaving more girlishly now, too. There was something very virginal and timid in her roguishness; for she was inclined to be roguish with that printer, and with Fremont, too. The swell of her arm from the wrist as she set the type, the trimness of her ankles as she dangled her feet from the high stool, or tripped over the grass, the rounded curves of her rather Junoesque figure under her long apron, the style of her when she went soberly with him and the children to hear Elder Skeels preach, the pure tones of her voice as she sang in church or hummed her cradle song to the little ones—within six months after their marriage—if one may call it that—Fremont was wondering why every man in the village was not in love with Catherine. She was growing more and more wonderful to him.

Sometimes he had difficulty in concealing from her the fact that he felt thus. That he must conceal it, he took as a matter of honor. If he should ever make with her the blunder that had caused the rupture with May, he shrank from a contemplation of the impossible situation which would be created. The ignominy of it for him! The insult to her! She was as completely in his care as if they had been together wrecked in some wilderness. How defenseless she would be if he proved perfidious by falling in love with his wife, or betraying his love should such a catastrophe befall him! It was this quixotic notion that caused me to modify the

statement I made just now as to their happiness. I said they were very happy for a while. The idyllic period drew to a close just as the impulse grew upon our Don Quixote to show forth his new warmth of feeling toward the woman he had promised to love, honor and cherish. He felt he could honor and cherish her by one course of conduct only, and that was to omit the love, save in the platonic sense. He wished he could read that old novel, the title of which he remembered, *He Fell in Love with His Wife*. He felt the need of a manual of conduct, and of expert guidance. Every day of Catherine's gentle and efficient rule over his household, every week of her cheerful work in the office made it harder for him, and all the time, by his increasing aloofness from her he filled her with wonder as to what she had done to offend him, and as to whether or not he was not already weary of their very sensible arrangement, into which they had entered as marking clearly their only proper course.

The *Sun* and the job printing plant was not remunerative. Catherine had told their printer one day that, while she knew very well that a woman could never be a good printer, she wanted to learn how to do letter-heads, sale bills and the like after a fashion—and practised until he said she'd do about as well as any woman could be expected to. And before long Catherine could turn off a job better than that of most of the tramps, with the aid of Caliban and Surajah Fewkes. But yet, the income was not such as to prevent Fremont's having a definite interest in the cost of bread and butter, and the meat which in those days we bought with a little liver "thrown in." Do any of you remember that custom of throwing in a piece of liver, or a soup-bone? Ah! As Uncle Steve Lawless says: "Them days is gone forever."

Then the Calligraph came into play. The Calligraph was one of those old typewriting machines which made

more noise than the *Sun* press, which never worked well, but which always worked, so that if you will to-day go to any junk shop and dig a Calligraph out of the pile, knock the bits of wire, the nails and rust out of it, and set it on a table, it will work still. It was indestructible.

"Does this go with the outfit?" asked Fremont of Smith and Raws Upright.

"Yes," said Raws. "It's covered by the mortgage, ain't it, Smith?"

"If it ain't," said Smith, "we'll stretch the mortgage to cover it."

"What's this extra roller made of brass for?" asked Fremont.

That was for the correspondence, Smith explained. Nothing much ever occurred in the vicinity of Lithopolis; but once in a dog's age, there was a happening which the city papers would use if it were written up and sent out by mail. By having a brass roller, and using very thin copy-paper, one could make from thirty to forty copies. These could be sent out by mail to the papers, from coast to coast, with a release date; and they often got by the editors, not so much as news, but to make variegated the page.

"Now Mark Twain's story of the Jumping Frog," said Smith, "wouldn't have been news if it had been mailed or wired under a Frogville date line, but the man that could send out a Jumping Frog story every day from Lithopolis, would rake down a nice little bunch of money every week. Of course you and I aren't Mark Twains, but semi-periodically, you'll find that it'll be worth your while to unlimber the old Calligraph, with the brass roller trained on the papers in the list in the little drawer there."

They were newspapers from the Atlantic to the Pacific. For a long time Fremont forgot all about the demand for Jumping Frog tales—or "fakes" as the newspaper boys called them; but one day when he and Cathie had talked

over their financial stringency, he with great solemnity—at first—and she with a certain glee as if it were all a joke, it occurred to him that if the Caliban element in his printing plant made so attractive a spectacle to the home folks, it might furnish good reading matter for city people. So he wrote on his Calligraph and sent out to his list of papers, a prettily-written story of Caliban and the *Sun,* with a photograph of the plant and of Caliban in action. The title he gave it was, "A One Dog-Power Newspaper." The fact that he was called upon by wire for pictures of himself and of the lady who set type indicated that he had scored. It was a Sunday paper feature from Denver to Maine.

Then began Fremont's period of growth in the field of fiction. Not the artistic sort; but in that peculiar kind of fiction which pretends to be sober fact, but is accepted by readers as happening at the sign of the Cock and Bull.

At first our young fictionist felt that he should confine himself to touched-up facts, and his second story he owed to Catherine. Uncle Steve Lawless kept an advertisement of his Livery, Feed and Sales Stable in the *Sun* at all times, with the understanding that Fremont should "trade the bill out"—which was his manner of always having a team and vehicle at Fremont's disposal. One Sunday they took the children out for an airing in the fine surrey, and at one of the Bushyager's farms they saw the flock of domesticated wild geese that Fremont and Bent had founded away back in the days of cattle-herding, through the setting of a clutch of wild-goose eggs under a hen.

"That would make a good story for the Calligraph!" she remarked.

"Of course it would!" Fremont acknowledged. "Why haven't I thought of that!"

But as remarkable facts were not turned up every day or week, Fremont became a confirmed frequenter of the Cock and Bull. Many of you must remember those fakes

of his, though they were, of course, all unsigned, sent out under various date lines, and ranging in length from half a stickful to two columns. It was Fremont who told the world that, in our environment of barb-wire, under the law of evolution, the cattle of the midwest were beginning to develop protective scales on their necks. He it was who occupied the Sunday papers one day with the tale of the manner in which the cow-pony was being supplanted on the range by the bicycle, to illustrate which the artist showed scenes of round-ups of herds driven before vaqueros on their "wheels," and calves branded when roped by such riders who held their positions by means of spurs to their machines in lieu of the braced feet of the pony. It was he who started the great Webster County snake story which brought people from far and near to a cliff on the Des Moines River to watch a hole in the rocks into which an imaginative boy had seen the Iowa Dragon hide itself. In one of these articles he warned the eastern states that owing to their destruction of their forests, the wolves of the plains were finding their natural habitat extended eastward, and ere long "the wolf's long howl on Unalaska's shore" would echo in the environs of Chicago and New York. Of course he had the prairie chickens dying of chicken cholera, but this was only a five-line item.

And then he began to use a character who was a fusion of Uncle Steve Lawless and Grizzly Reed, the latter an old 'Forty-Niner who had lost two or three ribs and a bit of skull in a fight with a grizzly bear in California. These tales became almost a regular Sunday feature in several newspapers. They enabled the McConkeys to buy a new and larger job press and to put in a stationary engine to take Caliban's place. This was rendered necessary, as the reputation of the shop for good work and promptness extended by reason of Catherine's increasing skill and taste; and it finally emancipated her from the work entirely, save

as a sort of forewoman making frequent visits. The Calligraph was their salvation, allied as it was to reckless imagination and a surface knowledge of almost everything. I wish that I could say that Fremont was ashamed of this degradation of that genius of his which was to have taken him and Winifred to that tropic isle, and creative work amid the palms; but he was not in the least ashamed. He laughed at himself; but not at his former self whom he still respected, and plunged each morning into the the day's work of getting out job work, soliciting advertisements, getting subscribers, and writing his many inventions.

He now went occasionally to Monterey, taking Catherine with him with the babies, and leaving her with May while he did his business. May was as cordial as possible to him, and it was good to see her and Catherine together, all their old affection in evidence; but Fremont avoided any meeting with Paul Holbrook. He took the position now that Holbrook was right in his attack on the boodlers; but this did not prevent Fremont from harboring a feeling of aversion to him, which was as natural as it was inconsistent. The welcome he received from his old friends was rather pleasing to him. They even gave him advertisements appealing to their Lithopolis trade. One day, as they were starting on their homeward trip, they met Dick McGill of the *Monterey Journal,* the paper for which Fremont had written so extensively in prose and verse during his political career. McGill held up a hand, and the two carriages halted side by side.

"Started back to the brush?" asked Dick.

"Yes," said Fremont, "we must find our thicket before night."

"Say," asked Dick, "I stopped you to say hello, and to ask if you know who's sending out all these fakes to the metropolitan papers from this neck of the woods."

"Yes, I know," answered Fremont. "Why?"

"Well for Pete's sake!" protested Dick. "Why! Just as if I hadn't the right to complain when you plaster the country with good stuff and leave me off your list. Put me on, Freem. I can't pay you *Chicago Tribune* rates, but I'll use enough to make it an object to you. Put me on your list!"

"Of course I will," replied Fremont. "I never thought of it before."

"How's things going, down among the horse-thieves?"

"Come to Lithopolis," challenged Fremont, "and call us that—"

"Things kind o' slow in the print-shop line?" interrupted Mr. McGill.

"Getting better all the time," replied Fremont. "Here's the one I have to thank for it," indicating Catherine. "She's my manager of the job department. We've laid off the dog and put in an engine and a new job press."

"An' plastered the nation with the best fakes we've had for years," said Dick. "Well, when you sneaked off to Lithopolis when I wasn't looking, I was sore at you. I had a job for you. But this is good training you're getting. You'll bu'st, or get tired of it sometime, and then come an' talk to me."

"We were tired of the old life," said Catherine, "and wanted to get away by ourselves."

"That was just the spoony way of new married people," remarked Dick. "Hope you don't get over it only enough to show you that you can't do yourselves justice in that little burg down between the bluffs. Come back to the big town and help us grow."

"Our spoony way," ventured Fremont to Catherine as they drove on, and shooting a glance at her to see how she took it, "has put us in a position where Mr. McGill must bid higher if he wants me than he would have done for a man quite on the town. The *Sun* is worth that, anyhow!"

"I'm not ready to go back to the big town, as he calls it," said Catherine. "Let's develop a while in the village."

The reference to their time of spooning passed her by without touching. If Fremont had known the things to which she had been accustomed in the conversations of Aunt Zuby and other elderly ladies of her acquaintance, whose deliverances were now liberated, not to say licensed by the fact that Catherine was, like Polly in *Trelawney of the Wells,* now "a married woman," he would scarcely have expected that Dick McGill's allusion in their strangely regulated lives, would have moved the girl to any change of countenance! But if he thought that Cathie did not hear and understand his repetition of their old friend's phrase, he was mistaken.

As Fremont sat in his office that night clacking out something on the Calligraph, he suddenly became conscious that some one was standing by him, and looked up. It was Mark Owsley, in his shabby Prince Albert coat, looking just as he had done in Fremont's boyhood, before he had turned state's evidence in the great horse-thief case, and when he was winning his title of "Deacon" now shortened to "Deek."

"Good evening, Deek," said Fremont, without any thought of disrespect. "What can I do for you?"

"I saw," said Mr. Owsley, "the words 'Life Insurance' on your sign. I have long been thinking of getting my life insured."

"Good idea," commented Fremont, trying to think when before he had heard Owsley and life insurance mentioned together, "I'll be glad to write you. Can you pass medically, think?"

"I hope so," said Deek. "A temperate, and I hope, save for one backsliding, for which I pray daily to be forgiven, a virtuous life, ought to have left my health unimpaired. I feel like a fighting cock."

This last phrase, thought Fremont, as he reached for his blanks, showed that the language of piety had become a difficult medium for Deek, except for short passages. Mr. Owsley wanted a policy which required the smallest annual payments. He was not over-particular what its other provisions might be. He wanted it for a large sum for those days. He wished it to run in favor of his daughter Minnie, Claiborne Bushyager's wife.

"I am not a rich man, Mr. McConkey," said he, "but I can see my way clear to paying the annual premium; and now that my daughter's husband has deserted the honest life of an honest farmer, to keep a saloon, I feel that I should do all I can in my weak way to provide for her in case Claib's sins shall one day find him out after I am dead and gone to my reward."

"Whatever that may be," Fremont felt impelled to say—but refrained.

They went over to Doctor Fisher's office, found him in, and Owsley took the medical examination.

"At your age," said the doctor, "you're about the best risk I ever examined. Never overworked, I guess, Deek!"

"I've always tried to avoid excesses of all kinds," replied Owsley. "How much is to pay, Fremont? Here's the money. If I hain't accepted, it will come back, won't it?"

"My examination fee won't come back," said the doctor. "Don't you fall down and forget that, Deek!"

"Well, Cathie," said Fremont a few days later. "I got Deek Owsley's policy back and delivered it to him at the psychological moment—for him. I wouldn't deliver the policy if it were to-day. He's been arrested."

"Arrested?" exclaimed Catherine. "I'm sorry for Minnie! She seems to think everything of her father. What has he done now?"

"They say he tried to commit some swindle about a land deal in Nebraska," answered Fremont. "A sheriff came for him from somewhere near Plainview. But Deek has retained me, and I've got N. V. to help me, and we think we can get him off, for a while anyhow, on account of a flaw in the extradition papers. Owsley doesn't seem to have much money for purposes of defense, but the Bushyagers are trying to get Virgil Jackson, Sallie's husband, to advance our fees. Mine wouldn't be so much; but my learned colleague, Mr. Creede, will have to have real money. We'll know in a day or so whether or not Virgil will part with cash. He never has been known to do so yet; but Asher and Pitt and Bowie Bushyager are sitting on Virgil's door-step, looking both anxious and glum. This may be the beginning of a law practise for me, Cathie!"

"Well," said Cathie, "I suppose you must have a beginning, but I wish it were something else."

"Even Deek Owsley is entitled to be convicted legally if he has done anything wrong," argued Fremont; "and is supposed to be innocent until he's proved guilty. It's for such things that I've been admitted to the bar, you know."

What neither of them knew, what no one knew, was that the long conflict between the lawless forces and the community was just then reaching a crisis. The lawless forces in the government were in process of being brought to judgment by Paul Holbrook in the great County Cases; forces which had seized on power when public opinion was weak, and fattened first on absentee ownership of the property of the state, and then perpetuated this control through possession of the political organizations. In the field of banditry, the community was about to find itself face to face with the underworld which had begun with the marriage of a frontier thief to a woman of his own class somewhere along the Ohio River in the 'fifties, in the person of that Bushyager, who had squatted on the tract of brush along

the river close to the Crescent City Bend and who had reared those stalwart sons whose names we know so well, and who in turn, with the subnormal mentality and morality of their class, had been overtaken by the advance of civilization with which they were instinctively at war. And the war had gone on for a generation under a sort of cover. Many of the people of the county did not believe that the Bushyager gang had any real existence. They met these men on the roads, they exchanged work with them. The Bushyagers had many friends. Some of these were afterward suspected of having allied themselves with the bandits for profit, or for the protection of their own live stock. Some of them believed that the real thieves raised the outcry against the Bushyagers as a blind to the public eye and to divert suspicion from themselves. Whatever might be the real situation, said others, the days of stealing live stock were past, so far as any important operations were concerned.

They did not realize that if there was a Bushyager gang, when their old crimes became unprofitable or too perilous, the criminal mind would find new sorts of ways in which to work. The stage was set for new crimes for old criminals.

CHAPTER VII

A STUDY IN MOB PSYCHOLOGY

THERE was no time to lose in the defense of Mark Owsley, though Mr. Creede's ingenuity in the matter of fostering delays was recognized. I happen to be advised of the fact, however, of the strong pressure that was brought to bear on Virgil Jackson by his wife, formerly Sally Bushyager, and by all of the men of her family, from the white-haired Forrest down to her brother and former playmate, Bently. They brought Virgil to Fremont's office once, evidently under promise that he would throw his money into the scale in the interests of the Bushyagers. For this family felt that the peril of Owsley was the peril of the clan. He had once purchased immunity by a confession. Fremont remembered that day long ago when Bent had spoken so contemptuously of Owsley when telling him of Claib's marriage to Minnie. They feared treachery.

Jackson, a little man, almost a hunchback, known to have grown rich by the loaning of money on chattel mortgages, and by dealings in lands bought at tax sale in the hard times of the 'seventies, came into Fremont's office with Asher Bushyager, and with his wife, Sally, holding him by the arm. Her grasp was not, however, that of a woman leaning on one she loved. It resembled more the grip of an officer with a prisoner in custody.

"We've come," said Asher, in his quiet expressionless

way, "to fix up that matter of the money N. V. wants put up. Virgil says he'll pay it."

Virgil sat for a while in silence. He was pale, and when he raised his hand to his mouth, it trembled. Parting with money, risking money, taking any attitude toward money, save to get and keep, was a thing so inconceivable to him that Fremont had never believed in the ability of Owsley to obtain assistance from him. It would plainly cause him agony. Why should he do it? thought Fremont. What was Owsley to him? The ramifications of the affair were obvious afterward, but were then in darkness.

"I didn't bring my pocketbook with me," said he at last, squirming away from Sally's grasp on his arm.

"Write a check!" said she, seizing him by the shoulder and turning his face to hers. Her dead black eyes, so much like those of her uncle Asher, were fixed on his like those of a rattlesnake. "Write a check! Write a check!"

Virgil wriggled out of her clutch, and slipped quickly to the door. He appeared to be in a panic, for, after his next speech he ran out, leaving his hat on Fremont's desk.

"I'll have to think this over!" said he. "I work hard for my money—I'll have to think it over!" And he walked rapidly away bareheaded.

Asher never changed expression.

"What d'ye think, Sal?" he asked.

"The skunk!" she almost hissed. "He'll never do it!"

"Wal, come on, Sal," said Asher. "We'll see yeh ag'in, Freem. This thing hain't done, yit."

"Not by a damned sight!" said Sally. "Gimme the snake's hat!" And she went down the street following the serpent with the hat in her hand. Fremont telegraphed Mr. Creede that the attempt on Mr. Jackson's hoard had failed, but that the clients had not ceased their endeavors to raise the money. He little suspected the fateful truth of this.

Two days passed quietly. The Nebraska sheriff was performing the acts necessary to the perfection of the extradition papers, while Deek Owsley went about under bonds for his appearance at court. The men idling away their time at Uncle Steve Lawless' livery stable began to talk about the crops and the price of hogs. Then one day a ripple of interest ran over the group as Raws Upright drove through the street, one horse trotting and the other pushed to a gallop, and without stopping at his old place, drove to the office of the *Sun,* threw the lines to a boy who happened to be standing there, and rushed into the printing shop.

"How soon can you git me out two thousand of them?" he asked Fremont, laying before him the copy for a placard.

"I'll see," said Fremont, "in a hurry?"

"I want every member of the Anti-Horse-Thief Association to have one of 'em by to-morrow night!" said Raws. "After this Virge Jackson business, we better be linin' up the forces o' law an' order!"

"What Virge Jackson business?" asked Fremont, prevented for the moment from asking what Raws could possibly mean by the "forces of law and order."

"W'y, for God's sake," exclaimed Raws, "hain't you heard? Virge was ridin' from Crescent City to Forrest Bushyager's last evenin' with Bent Bushyager drivin', an' down in a holler, Bent got out to fix something he said was wrong with the buggy, an' while he was doin' his tinkerin' Virge was filled with buckshot—some murderer fired into him from the timber by the side of the road. When such things as that can be done, just because the Bushyager crowd can't git him to cough up money for Deek Owsley's defense, it calls on law-abidin' citizens to act!"

"Was he killed?" asked Fremont.

"Doc Bliven don't hold out much hopes for him," said

Raws. "The hosses started jest as the shot was fired, an' he didn't git all of it. But I reckon he got enough. He wouldn't let them take him to his home, an' he wun't let his wife nor any of her family come a-near him. He's got a guard over him f'r protection. Nobody thinks a hull lot of Virge Jackson, but it's the principle of the thing. When can you git them bills out fer me?"

The little office began humming with the rush job of work. Raws Upright went out promising to return when the press started, to begin sending them out. When the printer had the work well under way, Fremont sat down and tried to realize just what had happened. It was conceivable that this attempt on Jackson's life had been made for the purpose of putting his wife in possession of his estate. The Bushyagers might, in the absence of children or other legal claimants, with their limited intelligence believe that Sally would automatically become its owner immediately on her husband's death. And they might calculate on her ability to borrow money on the credit which his death would at once give her. In this they would be not much mistaken; in fact, Fremont saw how Sally Jackson, the widow of Virgil Jackson, deceased, could go to Jim Boyd, or the Lithopolis bank, and get a good deal of money. He found it difficult to believe, however, that Sally could be guilty, or that his old friend Bent had deliberately betrayed his brother-in-law in this horrible manner. There was his own connection with the defense of Owsley, too,—a most disturbing matter; but after deep thought, he could not see how he was in any manner blamable, even indirectly, with the crime against Virgil Jackson, even though it be admitted to have arisen from the desperation of the Bushyagers in their contemplation of what Mark Owsley might reveal in case they did not see him competently defended. It was Owsley who desired the services of Mr. Creede; it was Mr. Creede who had made the demand for fees—and a demand

which was not excessive. In Fremont McConkey's court, Fremont McConkey was acquitted; after his discharge, his curiosity became active.

"I don't quite see," said he to Mr. Upright, when that gentleman returned for his hand-bills, "just what this attempt on Mr. Jackson's life has to do with the Anti-Horse-Thief Association. Jackson wasn't stolen—he was shot; and he isn't a horse. Wherefore then this Fiery Cross policy?"

"You'll see," replied Raws. "What the farmers need is a leader ag'in' these outlaws."

"And you propose to see that they have a leader, eh?"

"You'll see—if they've got the gumption to be led," said Raws. "How much is my bill here? I've got to git busy."

"He's the same old Raws," remarked Fremont to Catherine that evening. "The day Holbrook made his great attack on the County Ring, Raws started out to reorganize the Anti-Horse-Thief Association. He'll get back into the county government on the strength of it, if the people don't look out. It's the old story. When the saloon men, gamblers and dive-keepers are united with the church people on something like an early-closing plan for the saloons, look out! The highbinders in politics always win. Raws knows on which side his political bread is buttered!"

The attempted assassination of Virgil Jackson was the first of the three events that led up to the Monterey County crisis. Nobody could see at first that it was of much public consequence. Doctor Bliven, who was the coroner of the county, as well as the most prominent physician, soon reported that Virgil Jackson's demands upon him were likely to be confined to his professional capacity, and would not be extended to his official functions. In other words, Virgil Jackson's life had been saved, saved by that little start made by the horses when the gun was fired from the clump of trees by the roadside. If Bent Bushyager was a murderer, it was only in intent.

Then came the second event.

It was evident afterward, that when Deek Owsley procured that insurance policy on his life, he was actuated by the motive of reaping some reward in person, rather than the laudable one of a benefit to his daughter Minnie after his death. It became clear that in this he had some understanding with the Bushyagers. The evidence showed that he intended to disappear, that a body, mutilated and dressed in his clothing, was to be found, and that the avails of the policy were to be divided between him and his accomplices.

And now, too soon after the writing of the policy for their purposes, their needs required that the crime be consummated. For their plan to seize upon the estate of Virgil Jackson had failed. Virgil was on the road to recovery. It is probable that all these new crimes, so far above the intelligence and so alien to the primitive Bushyagers, were planned by the smooth and tortuous Owsley as he sat in his cabin in the Crescent City bend of the river, like a spider in its web, preaching on occasion his gospel that we were then living in the Last Days foretold in Holy Writ.

He was living in his Last Days! For one afternoon, Deek Owsley drove into Lithopolis, and seemed to make it a point to be much observed. He called on Fremont McConkey, bringing to little Lorena a pretty carnelian pebble he had found in the glacial gravel, and which he had ground and polished on one side. He stopped Elder Skeels on the street and asked him his opinion of the real meaning of a passage in the Book of Daniel, and wrote in a little book what the elder said about it. He inquired of Uncle Steve Lawless as to the river road south, and whether or not it was dangerous along the edge of a cliff, which was called, of course, "Lover's Leap,"

"It's narrer," answered Uncle Steve, "but if yeh c'n kinder reverse the laws o' gravitation on your off wheels an'

bear down heavy on the nigh side, it can't more'n drownd yeh in the river nohow."

Mr. Owsley drove off toward the passage in the road so lucidly described. Hans Pickelmann saw Claib and Asher Bushyager that same afternoon, driving rapidly along a road parallel to Owsley's, and in the same direction. Conrad Mennenga, another German farmer in this neighborhood, now taken over by Germans, saw the two Bushyagers as they drove down a hollow through the long grass to cut in ahead of Owsley as if to intercept him secretly. They, or traces of them, were seen as they made their way back in the night. And in the morning a man named Potter saw a grazing animal moving about through the brush on the bank of the river at a point reached by Owsley before the narrow place occurred of which he had inquired, and where the upland was divided from the bottom by a steep bank. On going to see whether or not the animal might not be a lost horse of his own, he found Owsley's horse with its harness partly torn off and quite detached from the buggy. Plainly, there had been an accident. Some unfortunate traveler had gone, with horse and conveyance, over the steep bank. Where was the carriage and its human freight? Perhaps the passengers had saved themselves by leaping; but why, then, had they not recaptured their horse? While he was asking these questions, he stumbled over the corpse of Mark Owsley as it lay in the grass, its head partly crushed as if by a horse's hoof, and its feet entangled in the lines; while a few rods away at the foot of the cliff lay what was left of the buggy, with the wheel on the side that had been next the bank, crushed. It looked as if the wheel, weakened by age, had broken when the carriage had canted over toward the edge of the cliff, and that in the ensuing crash, horse, buggy and man had gone over the cliff; that Owsley's feet had been entangled in the lines; that he had been dragged and bruised and trampled to

death. As to his death, there was no doubt. Potter, frightened, left the body lying where he found it, and gave the alarm. Some one suggested that it be left untouched until the coroner should arrive. Doctor Bliven came and brought the sheriff and Fremont McConkey with him. Fremont was interested as agent for the insurance company which had only just now received the premium on the Owsley policy. Besides, he thought, he might send out some press despatches about the accident.

The sheriff, the coroner and Fremont went over the ground in a rather perfunctory manner.

"I guess there's only one conclusion open," said the sheriff.

"Accident?" asked Doctor Bliven.

"Yes," said the sheriff. "Here's how it happened, Doc. See where the cliff broke off as he slipped over? Well, right back here the road is sideling—slopes down toward the edge. It's a dangerous road, and ought to be closed or widened or leveled. The weight of the whole rig was thrown on that bad wheel, and it just buckled under it, and the whole business went over. He was probably knocked senseless—for the buggy must have turned over twice, anyhow—and you see how he had the lines fastened together at the ends? They made a noose around his ankles; and helpless as he was, that horse, scared half crazy, dragged him and trampled him to death. Don't you see it that way?"

"Then why," asked Fremont, "is the rim of the wheel crushed out, instead of buckled back under the buggy?"

"How's that," queried the coroner. "Tell that again, Fremont!"

It was quite plain to Fremont that the accident, as he believed it to have been, had not occurred in the precise manner described by the sheriff. The wheel was crushed, but not in that way. The sheriff began a careful scrutiny of the ground, which he carried on in silence.

"Well," said Fremont presently, "I guess I'll walk back. I want to send out some press despatches, and notify the insurance company."

"What insurance company!" asked the sheriff.

"Why, Owsley had just taken out a policy of insurance on his life," said Fremont. "A large policy, too. Only last week. I must notify the company."

"In whose favor was it?" asked the sheriff.

"Minnie Bushyager, his daughter, Claib's wife."

"The devil you say!" exclaimed the sheriff. "I thought that a funny way for that wheel to break. Doc, there's work here for a coroner's jury. Don't you put anything in the papers, Freem, except about the accident; but there's a nigger in this wood-pile. I guess the boys outplayed the Deek in this death game!"

Everybody now knows what crime had been committed. The body was taken to Monterey after the coroner's jury had viewed the remains and inspected the site of the tragedy, and was kept in a receiving vault while the coroner and the jury deliberated. But people knew. A wave of passion swept through the community. Men gathered in groups in the town and the villages, talked in low tones, and fell silent when one of those who were tainted with association with the Bushyagers either joined the group, or loitered near, or merely passed by. Fremont felt a chill of hostility toward himself in passing these groups; and men like Grizzly Reed and Squire Wardle who were regarded as friendly to the outlaws grew shy of some of their neighbors—or drew closer to others according to the line drawn by the new hostilities; for Lithopolis was the Bushyager stronghold, and there was apprehension abroad that when the attempt was made to apply force, either that of the law, or another and more terrible power, the impulse to which was growing every day, there would be, no one knew what riot and bloodshed. Even, among peaceful citi-

zens, the conviction had taken hold that the established authorities having failed for a generation to wipe out this stain on the community, to cure this ulcer, there was only one thing to do—to cut it out. Every mysterious disappearance for a quarter of a century, every highway robbery, every loss of horse or swine or cattle, every malicious destruction of property—the cutting of wire fences, the hamstringing of horses, the poisoning of cattle—was retold and traced to this gang. The misdoings of the court-house ring were forgotten for the time. Roswell Upright rode from township to township bearing his Fiery Cross.

His slogan was the story of the crime against Virgil Jackson, which was an attempt to get money for Owsley's defense, that Owsley might not turn traitor as he had once done, and buy immunity at the expense of his criminal associates. "They knew him," Raws would say, "and he pushed 'em to help him!" And then when that failed, they had sent Deek off to fall over the Lover's Leap, they to furnish the body; but had delved deeper by giving him a real instead of a simulated death. Whose body did they think of putting into his clothes, if they ever promised him they would? "It might have been yourn, or yourn, or yourn! An' they'd 've done it, too, if they hadn't wanted to git rid of Deek Owsley as well as git the insurance money. The time's comin' an' that right soon, when we'll know which of 'em killed him. An' when the time comes, I know what you'll do if you're men!"

In the midst of this the sheriff made his first move in the game. The coroner's jury's verdict had been held back, first to permit the accumulation of evidence, and second—I think I can say it without injustice to him—because Doctor Bliven was afraid. He had ample evidence on which to render a verdict that Mark Owsley had been murdered by Asher and Claiborne Bushyager; but he felt that no sooner would such a verdict be found than his own person would

become a target to be shot at from every bush and haystack as he made his lonely drives over the county, and that his good fortune might not be equal to that of Virgil Jackson, even. So the verdict was delayed, held back, and Fremont reaped considerable gain by keeping the great Monterey County mystery in the daily papers. It flamed out on the first page again, when the sheriff made that first move of his. He came quietly into Lithopolis one day when Asher was in Claib's saloon, and arrested them both, without awaiting the verdict of the coroner's jury; thereby gaining great acclaim from the people.

They were quietly conveyed to the jail in Monterey. With equal quietness, they were slipped out at its back door and taken in a closed carriage to another county. The sheriff had correctly gauged the temper of his community. As twilight descended on the little city, the day of the arrest, the streets seemed unusually full of men. Farmers especially had come into town in great numbers. Vehicles from the smaller villages arrived in processions which reminded observers of the influx of people from the outlying parts of the county at the annual agricultural fair; but the average citizen was puzzled by the fact that there was no entertainment in the town that night, no public speech—nothing to impel these industrious men and women—only on second glance he saw that they were all men—to lose their hard-earned sleep. But the deputy in charge of the jail knew; and when at about ten he found the jail surrounded by a mob of men in various sorts of masks—men with weapons in their hands, he stepped quietly out among them.

"Nice evening!" he remarked to all and sundry; and when he received no reply—unless their crowding very closely about him was a response, he proceeded with his remarks. "Why, this is the nicest turnout I've seen for a long time. If I was anything of a speaker, I declare I'd make an *ad*dress. Want anything?"

"We want Claib and Asher Bushyager!" answered a tall man who assumed the rôle of leader. "And we'll have 'em or we'll tear down the jail."

"Now, I'm right sorry," said the deputy; "but Claib and Asher called for a little while to-day, but they're gone. Step right into the jail, gentlemen, and look around. There ain't a prisoner there. Jail's been empty for a week. Law-abiding community. Come on in, boys. You're welcome to all you can find. Fact is, the sheriff kind of looked for something like this, and not wantin' any trouble with his old friends, he went off for a little trip with Claib and Asher. They're perfectly safe, and are going to stay so. Help yourselves, boys. Sorry I've got no cigars."

And that was the end of the second phase of the crisis. The third brought Catherine and Fremont into the history.

The story now becomes a tale which the people of the community never understood. There were various opinions, and after passions cooled, one was often surprised to find in the people an undercurrent of something like sympathy for the Bushyagers. I have found only the clue to the truth myself within the past month. I had it given to me by Raws Upright. He is an old man, now, and I had not seen him since he went into a state west of us—I shall not say which one—took up a homestead along one of the new lines of railway to begin life over again. I was on a street-car—a car on the new line which runs out to Lithopolis from Monterey, and was looking at the old farmhouses we used to drive by on the old earth road, now surrounded by factories and the low dwellings of the workmen. I did not recognize him at first; but when he sat down by me and slapped me on the knee, I knew him immediately. That bass roar of his voice was unmistakable.

"I thought you lived out west," I said.

"I do," said Raws. "Greatest country in the world! We had a little dry spell this summer, an' I come back to

see if I couldn't git up a fund to buy the folks around me seed wheat for next spring. Can't you help us a little?"

"Why do you live in that God-forsaken country?" I asked in the true Hawkeye spirit of pride in our richness. "Why don't you come back to good old Iowa, where you can really live, Raws?"

"You couldn't hire me to come back!" he shouted; and then, lowering his voice to something like the whisper of a shorthorn bull he went on, "There's ten years' good stealin' out there yet!"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said I. "I'll be milked for enough wheat to seed a few acres, if you'll answer a few questions on Monterey County history. Now that Doctor Bliven is dead, you're the only man that knows."

As a result, I can set down here some facts that will clear up a puzzle; which I now do.

Mob law is enacted by fear and executed by reversion to savagery. The fear in our community sprang from a conviction that the criminals had so increased in number that these new crimes grew out of their belief that they could make head against the forces which called themselves those of law and order. Every man who had enlisted in the fight at the head of which Raws Upright had placed himself, thought that a few miles away was a region in which the Bushyagers had control, though, of course, most of his own neighbors were honest men.

The fear in the minds of the coroner and of Raws Upright himself, was that, now that two of the gang had been caught, the rest of them would be more desperate than ever. If they had only succeeded in destroying Claib and Asher! But the two had been spirited away to a safe trial and conviction for murder. If now, they could only get Pitt Bushyager, and Bent, and Bowie and Forrest behind the bars, they could wipe out the whole gang as far as the leaders were concerned, and deal with their followers in de-

tail afterward. To make the attempt to dispose of them by an open attack on such men against whom no formal charge of criminality had been lodged, no matter how guilty every one knew them to be, would be merely to begin a guerrilla war, in which the forces, which insisted they were those of law and order, would be at a disadvantage, strategically and legally. But how to get the Bushyagers at a disadvantage? This was the problem in the sordid situation which had only one excuse, the excuse for most wars and tumults—that it grew out of history itself.

The solution was attempted by the third move in the game—and the one which so puzzled our little world afterward.

One day Doctor Bliven, driving out to visit the wounded Virgil Jackson, was accompanied by Raws Upright. They returned two hours later, their horses foaming and panting, their buggy-top riddled with bullets, and with bullet holes through the buggy-box. They had been attacked, they said, in a hollow near the house where Virgil Jackson lay languishing still under guard, by the whole gang of Bushyagers, and it was only by the speed of their horses that they had escaped.

Their story was doubted from the first. Uncle Steve Lawless, on examining the buggy, called attention to the fact that the bullets seemed to have passed *out* through the box, and not *into* it. And the buggy disappeared and was never seen again. But any one seen to smile at this cock-and-bull story was soon rendered solemn by the deadly seriousness of those who preferred to believe it. In such times belief is always merely a matter of personal preference. The tragedy of the world lies in the fact that beliefs are so mournfully a matter of personal preference.

The justice of the peace was old Judge Horace Stone, who so long ago had founded Lithopolis and had tried to make it the great town of Monterey County. To him went

Raws Upright and filed information under oath charging Forrest, Bowie, Pitt and Bently Bushyager with a felonious assault with intent to kill himself and Doctor Bliven. Judge Stone, with hands trembling, but with age, I think, not fear, for he was of the old bold pioneer stock, filled up the blank warrant and handed it to the constable to serve.

"I'll swear in as many extras as you want to take them," said he. "How many, and who?"

Upright gave the constable a paper. The constable looked it over, and handed it to Judge Stone.

"Give me these men," said he, in a husky voice. "They're all single fellers."

Oddly enough, all the "single fellers" were in Lithopolis at that moment, as if by prearrangement. It was a puzzling thing afterward, to remember this prearrangement of the list of names in the hands of Upright, and of this posse of men, many of them not residents of the village, whose names Upright handed the constable at the moment of his receipt of the warrant.

Would the posse be able to make the arrest of these men? Not, Fremont told Catherine, if they were expecting apprehension—and if they had committed this assault, they would expect it. The village breathed easier, as the constables came in, late in the day, with Pitt Bushyager, and Bowie, and the mild white old Forrest, eldest of the sinister family, in custody. They had picked them up at their respective homes where they were idling about the premises in true Bushyager fashion; but when they went down to the old Crescent City site to take Bent, they had met resistance. They had had a running fight with Bently in the brush, in which one of the constables had been shot through the arm; and they believed that Bent had been hit, but he had got away.

"We'll git him yet," said the constable, now flushed

with success, as the three Bushyagers were arraigned before Judge Stone.

"The hell you will!" sneered Pitt. "He'll be more liable to git you, Sam! Wal, Judge, what's all thus rukus about? Spit it out, fellers! I want to git back home!"

Pitt was defiant, and filled with confidence. He seemed to be sure that his enemies had made a foolish error in causing this arrest. Bowie's black beard, grizzled a little with gray, swept his broad chest as he lowered his dead black eyes, and almost hid his pock-pitted face, as he gently cautioned Pitt against lack of respect for the court. Forrest stood aloof from his brothers then, as he always did in the opinion of most of the people, and said nothing. Judge Stone read the information.

"Do you damned fools think," said Pitt, his dark handsome face flushed with rage, "that me an' my brothers would 'a' missed these scum if we'd tried to get 'em? Hell, you make me sick!"

"It's too late to finish this case to-night," said the judge. "I, therefore, will remand the prisoners to the city jail until eight o'clock to-morrow morning, when the hearing will be resumed."

Bowie and Pitt exchanged glances at the word "jail." Forrest stepped up to the desk of the justice of the peace, and bowed his white head.

"Judge," said he, "this is kind o' hard on me. I was took when I was down to Pitt's place, an' my folks don't know where I am. They'll be right oneasy if I don't come home. I've got a lot o' stock an' no hired help. I or'to be let go so I can feed, an' tell my wife about this. I'm innocent, Judge, an' you must b'leeve I am. I've got plenty of property, an' can give any reasonable bond. I ask you kindly to let me give bond, an' go home—I ask it humbly an' kindly, gentlemen, all. I think I got the right to do it."

Judge Stone looked up at the ceiling, and then his eyes

The constables came in with Pitt Bushyager and Bowie, and the mild white old Forrest.

wandered about the room, finally catching the glance of Roswell Upright. Upright shook his head. I think this shake of the head saved Forrest Bushyager's life. Judge Stone flushed at the thought of taking instructions from the bystanders as to his duty.

"The defendant, Forrest Bushyager," said he with great dignity, "will be permitted to sign his own bond in the sum of ten thousand dollars, conditioned on his being in Court at eight o'clock to-morrow morning. The Court will stand adjourned until that time."

A murmur of anger went through the room; and in the midst of it, Pitt and Bowie, each striking down the nearest man of their captors, made a dash for the door in a desperate attempt at escape. The word desperation is the exact term; for they knew what that night in jail might mean for them. There was a fierce struggle, the two men were overpowered by numbers, and carried bodily to the little prison next door, thrust in and left under guard behind the locked door. And while this was going on, Judge Stone walked through the crowd with Forrest Bushyager, placed him in a farmer's wagon, and commanded the driver to take Mr. Bushyager home. When the crowd had had time to think of him again, he was gone. He still lives on his own farm, and the case of the State of Iowa vs. Forrest Bushyager was dismissed long since for lack of evidence.

That evening Fremont McConkey sat with Catherine and his two children in their little parlor. He had sent off his press despatches, eaten his evening meal, and was watching the street outside for the mob, which he expected. The Bushyagers, Pitt and Bowie, were in a trap. He had not at that time made up his mind, as I now have, that the trap was a false arrest, for the express purpose of serving as a trap; but that it was. He wished that Catherine and the little ones were out of the village. It might be a fear-

ful night. He was a little more tender to Cathie than was his wont. He was undecided whether or not to warn her of the coming storm. As he pondered on this, he heard a strange scrabbling sound at the back door, the door leading out into their "Boffin's Bower."

"What queer sound is that?" said Catherine, starting up.

"I'll go!" exclaimed Fremont.

As he opened the door Catherine stood back of him peering over his shoulder. There was a staggering man on the step, a man who, when the door opened, swayed in, and fell to his knees in the kitchen. He was dressed in common clothes, and down over his back, down below his waist, there spread a great stain of blood.

"Take me in an' hide me, Freem," said a husky voice. "Don't yeh know me, Freem? I'm Bent! They got me right through here! You're the onliest friend I got, Freem, an' I thought they never'd look f'r me in this town. Don't turn me away, ma'am, f'r God's sake. They'll kill me if yeh do! They've got my father an' uncle, and they'll lynch 'em sure. I come to my ol' friend. If I don't die, I'll be so I can light out by to-morrow night. I'll stain up your bed bad, ma'am, but maybe you can put something over it. I hate to be killed like a dog—!"

And he fell fainting at the feet of his "onliest" friend.

"Can you carry his feet, Catherine?" asked Fremont. "I've got to get him to bed, and find Doctor Fisher!"

"Fremont," said Catherine, when they had put him in Fremont's bed and made him as comfortable as possible, "I —we—I don't care for myself; but if the mob comes and finds him, what will they do to you, dear? What will they do to you!"

Fremont took her hands and pressed them—a thing he had not dared to do for months, for fear of being betrayed into that—that blunder.

"If any harm comes to me," said he, "for taking in my old playmate when he is wounded, and I think dying, I'll take the consequences, Catherine! Be as brave as you can while I'm gone. It will only be a little while. I'm going to bring the doctor!"

CHAPTER VIII

TRIAL AND ACQUITTAL

FREMONT walked hastily to the low, two-room building in which Doctor Fisher maintained his office. It was the dark beginning of a night which was later to be lighted by a moon past its full. The office was dark, and on knocking without response and trying the door, he turned away to go to the doctor's residence. As he hurried along, he noted the gathering groups of men on the sidewalks, and the vehicles laden with men entering the village by both the roads leading into it; and across the bridge which spanned the river he heard sounds of voices, and that confused murmur which betrays the presence of a considerable crowd. Uncle Steve Lawless called to him as he passed the livery stable. "That you, Freem?" he inquired.

"Yes," answered Fremont, "have you seen Doc Fisher?"

"Not sence supper," answered Uncle Steve. "Anybody sick?"

"I don't know how sick," answered Fremont evasively; "but I thought I'd like to have him look in to-night."

"I'll tell him if I see him," answered Uncle Steve. Then coming close to Fremont he went on, "Fremont, you're most as much a man now as I be, an' of age, of course, but I got something to say to you. If anybody wakes you up in the night an' asks you what I think about your bein' too numerous on these here streets to-night, you tell 'em for me, that I think the best thing you can do on a dark night like this, is to lay low."

"If you mean by that, Uncle Steve," said Fremont hotly, "that there's any good reason why I can't walk these streets on this or any other night or day, I respectfully reply that you're mistaken."

"Did I mention anything about reason?" asked Uncle Steve. "If I did it was my mistake. Reason is goin' to be a mighty sca'ce article in this man's town to-night. I want to make it strong, my boy, that you better hole up till reason resumes her sway. This is straight talk, Freem. A man hears a lot of gabble while he's shampooin' hosses. Go home an' stay till things quiet down. Bein' a darned fool's liable to cost you more to-night than you can pay. Do as I say!"

"Thank you, Uncle Steve. After I find the doctor, I can think of nothing that will call me out-of-doors."

He met Doctor Fisher on his way to his office, and without telling what sort of case awaited him, took him to his own house.

"Your patient is up in my room," said he, when the front door had shut behind them. "Before I take you up, Doctor, I want to tell you that you are about to come into possession of knowledge which may call for the exercise of much discretion on your part, and that your use of it may mean a good deal to me personally. I want you to promise that what you learn here you will not disclose to any one for twenty-four hours, and not then unless you think it your duty. I ask for protection, and I ask it temporarily for your patient."

"That's easy," said the doctor. "The first duty of a doctor is to hold his tongue. I can't think of anything I'm likely to learn here that I can't promise to maintain secrecy about forever, to say nothing of twenty-four hours. Anyhow, you'll have to trust me not at all, or all in all. Shall we go up?"

Up-stairs it was the old, old story of the sweat of agony

at probings of wounds, of the hurrying back and forth of a woman with the surgeon's necessaries, of anxious wiping of the pale brow, of glances of pity and smiles of ultimate relief—but not of moans. Bent bit his lips and held in his groans as might an Indian at the stake. Catherine stood over her patient like a ministering angel. After the probing and the bandaging were over, and the man lay weak and pale in his clean white garments, he looked up at her and weakly inquired:

"Air there many women like you amongst folks like you?"

"Oh, many that are lots better nurses," said Catherine. "You'd better not talk, you know. You need your strength."

"I guess Freem done best not to come in with us," said Bently. "He went with you, an' that's better. Whar is he?"

"He's gone back into the office," said Catherine. "He'll be back soon. Do you want to see him?"

"When he comes, I do," answered Bent. "I reckon my strength has done fer me all it ever will—if that doctor tells, I know it has."

"Do you recognize him?" asked Fremont of the doctor as he went away.

"Young Bushyager, isn't it?" said the doctor. "That's what you had in mind when you spoke of keeping this thing quiet. Well, there's no reason why I should say anything, even if they'd killed Upright and Bliven. I didn't probe hard for the bullet. No use. He won't escape, except to a fairer clime than Iowa—I hope. He's bleeding inside. All we can do is to make him comfortable—and it won't be for long. I'll try to get back later."

Fremont went back into his office again, when he had been told by Catherine that Bently had succumbed to an opiate and was sleeping.

"Oh, Fremont!" she exclaimed, clinging to his hand. "How can men he so cruel. He's such a pitiful sight, Fremont, that it breaks my heart—and I can do nothing for him but try to make him comfortable. He's going out into the cold and dark—and he's just like a little child!"

"That's what he is," said Fremont. "A neglected child of society! I'm going to the office, Catherine. You must promise that you'll slip back and call me if he wakes. I hope he won't wake, for a while."

"The doctor says he'll sleep for hours. Why do you go back to the office? You're tired. Lie down on my bed and sleep, and I'll watch with Bently. I'm not tired!"

"But, remember, Cathie, that I'm a newspaper reporter, as well as a harborer of wounded criminals. I want to see what's going on—if there is anything. I can slip out on Main Street or I can watch what I shall want to see from the front window of the office. But be sure to let me know if anything unusual occurs. Not afraid to stay with him, are you, little girl?"

"No, not of that," she said, "but I am a little afraid of —of everything. I'm glad you'll be where I can call you."

"No danger," said Fremont, with a little pressure of his arm about her shoulder. "I'll look in once in a while, and maybe I'll be able to come back soon. I guess nothing is going to happen."

He stood at the front window of the unlighted printing office, scrutinizing the quiet street, so dark an hour or so ago, but now fully bathed in the pure white moonlight on the opposite side, and striped across with clean-cut lights and shadows from the shining of the moon between the buildings on his own side. At first he could see no one on the street, but presently he saw the form of a man standing at each stairway leading down from inhabited rooms over store buildings—forms with glittering things in their hands which looked like guns. It seemed as though guards had

been stationed at these places for the purpose of keeping the tenants of these upper rooms from leaving their homes. Fremont recognized in this a detail of the news story he might be called upon to write, and unlocking his front door, stepped out on the sidewalk with the intention of ascertaining whether or not the entrances to Main Street were closed. His question was soon settled—first by a group of men with guns standing at each end, in the middle of the short street, and second, by the muzzle of a shotgun pressed against his breast as he came out upon the sidewalk.

"Git back in there!" The command was snapped out with an oath for emphasis. "Git back, an' lock your door! It ain't a healthy air out here!"

"Your argument is irresistible," replied Fremont. "I yield. There's something familiar in that voice of yours, but I can't quite recognize it."

"The less you recognize to-night," said the voice, "the better it'll be for you! Git back, before I fix you so's you won't recognize anything any more—an' lock that door!"

Fremont thought, after all, the outlook from the office window was quite as good as from the street, if the event for which he was watching took on actuality; for it looked out directly at the front of Judge Stone's old court-house, now called the City Hall. The door of the jail was opposite Fremont's station, and was now flooded with moonlight. So when that dreadful Thing which is the negation of Civilization, and her last reversion to the hunting instinct, the Mob, came and confronted its inanimate victim, the jail, he could see the scene as if in a dimmed mirror. He had not been at the window five minutes, when it came. It came with no noise but a shuffling of feet, and it carried in its midst a strange battering-ram for the breaching of the jail door which had been left, as is the custom in most villages, unguarded save by its own strength. Its strength was considerable—hence the battering-ram, a contrivance

as primitive as the amorphous monster that carried it. They had cut one of Judge Stone's beautiful spruce trees, planted so long ago in the little public square, and had trimmed it to a bare pole, save for eight or ten feet near the butt, where they had left projecting limbs as handholds—a savage and effective instrument.

They came with it to the door, and without a moment's hesitation save perhaps for words of command too low for Fremont to hear, they drew it back, and with the whole power of fifteen men, struck the door a blow which, filling the little street with its crashing sound, resounded through the village. A dozen blows and the door was crushed inward, the log was thrown aside, the door itself cast contemptuously into the street. The first barrier of the Law had fallen before lawlessness.

What followed, Fremont could then only conjecture; though he knew, when he saw the crowd rush into the little prison, just what was the physical situation. As to the human factors, he was conscious only of a horror of the mob, and a feeling of pity for the two poor victims of it, caught thus, like wolves in a deadfall. He knew that there were two rooms or cells in the jail, just wide enough for each to accommodate a bed or bunk. The doors of the cells were not locked. Both the Bushyagers were in the rear cell awaiting their fate; with their backs braced against their bunk, and their feet against the door, their powerful muscles nerved by desperation, were making their last dilatory motion in this Court of Last Resort. The horror and the pity of it all!

They heard the blows on the doors; they heard the door crash as it went down; they heard the rush into the passage; they heard the hub-bub in the empty cell as the hunters looked there for their prey; and they heard oaths as the mob tried the last door, and found it firmly held.

"Give us a chance, you damned cowards!"

It was the voice of Pitt Bushyager from the inside of the last stronghold.

"Give us a chance, an' we'll fight our way out with our bare hands!"

"We'll give you the same chance you've give others!" roared a bellowing voice. "Can't you git that door open, boys!"

But the door was now a problem. The battering-ram was useless. It could not be used in that narrow hall.

"Bring a sledge!" shouted the bellowing voice.

The sledge was brought; but the last barrier still refused to yield. The lock or latch gave way under the weak hammer blows, but the strong door, held by those poor stressed muscles as by a human bolt, would only quiver and give and come firmly back into place. Did the pity of it appeal to those men? No—the Hunting Instinct was aroused. The men within might as well have been rattlesnakes as men. The only passion aroused by their resistance was impatience at the delay, anger because the narrow passage gave no room in which to swing the sledge.

At this stage of the tragedy, Fremont heard shots fired in the jail, and believed that the door had been battered down, and the Bushyagers shot. But the sound of firing kept up. Why was this? It was only afterward that he solved this problem. The solution was this: Over each cell door was a little slit of a window through which food and water could be pushed. After the failure of the sledge as a breaching instrument, some one had climbed on a stepladder and begun firing downward into the cell, into an interior as dark as the fool's heart that did the firing, with the intention of bringing to an end that rigid resistance. If the trapped men rolled down into a corner to escape the shots, the door could be opened. If the shots took effect, those powerful legs and backs would give way. By keeping up the bombardment, some one would finally be hit, in spite of

the darkness. It was an admirably devilish conception; and at last it worked; for a bullet passing diagonally downward through the slit, found its mark in the shoulder of Pitt Bushyager, as he sat bowed forward in his attempt to avoid the bullets, and, ranging downward, reached a vital spot below.

"They've got me!" he gasped, and, crumpling down on the floor, he rolled back under the bunk, his last thought to leave free the space in which Asher was to make his fight unimpeded by the body of his brother.

And then, Fremont saw the end! There issued from the mouth of the passage a tumbled mass of arms, legs and bodies, like the agitated mingling of human beings at the last second of a football scrimmage. Asher the Silent had yielded the door. No, when he knew that Pitt was gone, he threw the door open as if to welcome his foes, and in the surprise caused by this act, he had plunged headlong into the group between him and the open—the open for which alone he was fitted—the open of stark struggle with beasts and men. For three-fourths of the length of the passage he carried them before him. No one dared to fire in that crush of men. Their only course was to grapple with him. He dragged them with him to the door. He shook them off as a bear shakes off dogs, and he stood once more out in the open—and surrounded by his foes. The men who had been in the fight in the passage leaped sidewise and left the field clear for shots. Asher faced the firing squad. But not submissively; silent as ever, he made for that part of the ring of enemies which seemed thinnest—and Fremont, watching from his window, saw a sheet of flame as rifle, shotgun and pistol spoke; and Asher Bushyager went down in a shapeless heap at the feet of the men who had dug him from his den.

For a moment nobody moved. Then some one came up and looked at the dead man on the ground. Others came

and inspected their work with deliberation and calmness. Others still went into the cell and came out after passing upon the completeness of that other piece of work under the bunk. In a few moments the place was deserted. Fremont opened his door and walked over to the clay in the street. By the time he had decided that Asher had been instantly killed, several citizens who had been held back by the mob were there, and had brought the body of Pitt out into the moonlight. Fremont grew sick. He had seen enough! And there was his promise to Catherine—a promise which he had forgotten. He went back into his office, locked the door and walked through the bower back into his house. He found poor Bently sleeping the deep slumber given by opiates, but was surprised that Catherine was not there. He passed through the little hall, and found her peering through the curtains at a group of men in the street and on the lawn in front of their house.

It was the mob; for in the moonlight Fremont could see that they had masks over their faces!

"Do you suppose," said she, "that they are coming to kill that poor dying boy?"

"It must be," said Fremont. "The doctor must have told! Stay here, and if they break in, go into your room with the children, and stay there! I'm going down to see."

He thought to go out by the back door and listen at the corner of the house in the hope of learning their purposes from their talk. As he stepped out on the door-step, his experience earlier in the evening was repeated—a gun was pressed against him, and he was ordered back into the house.

"Nobody goes in or out here," said the man, in a voice which resembled that of Owen Gowdy. "Go back there, or I'll shoot!"

"No need of that," said Fremont. "But what's the idea?"

"Go back, that's all!"

He turned back into the house, dazed at first, and then he felt in his breast a flame of indignation. Was not an Englishman's house his castle; and was not he the heir of this old tradition? He thought of his shotgun and of the cartridges loaded with goose shot in the pocket of his shooting coat; but instead of going up to the room where the weapon stood in the corner, he went to the front of the house. From the bay-window he could look out upon the porch; and there he saw another man, masked and armed, guarding the front door. He gently raised the window and listened. There seemed to be an argument going on in the mob out there.

"I tell you," said that bellowing voice of the leader, "we've done enough. We've got the Bushyager gang wiped out. We'll git Bent, yit, an' I think the best thing we can do is to scatter out in the brush up the river, an' see 'f we can't find him. Claib an' Bowie git penitentiary for life; and if they don't, we can deal with them when the time comes. If we go any furder to-night, we'll have the people ag'in' us. We've gone fur enough, boys!"

"Fur enough, hell!" said another. "Le's make a clean job of it! This feller's been in with the gang sence he was a boy! He sold that insurance policy on Deek Owsley's life. Him and them has always run together like hot soap! They backed him in politics. Now's the time to dig out the last root of 'em—an' he's the last root! Don't let Raws fool yeh, boys! Foller me!"

Fremont felt Catherine's trembling hand on his arm.

"Fremont! Fremont!" she whispered. "They're not after Bent! They're talking of hurting you, Fremont! I'll hold them at the front door, and you run out through the office! Run, Fremont!"

"Come with me!"

Fremont took Catherine by the hand, and led her up

the stairs. He took her to the door of her room, and gently pushed her inside.

"Stay with the babies," said he, "I'll have to do as I think best, dear!"

He ran to the room where Bently lay still in the stupor of sleep, took up his gun, broke it and tried the action, slipped two of the goose-shot cartridges into it, and walked to the head of the stairs. He felt suddenly free. The hunting instinct in him had answered that in the voice of the last speaker outside. At the upper landing he found Cathie standing.

"There will be more funerals than mine," said he, "if they go on with this! I don't so much care, Cathie! Life as we've been living it hasn't many charms. I'm going now. Stay in your room, dear, and remember that the last words I said to you are that I love you. I love you too well to live with you the way we've been living. You've been like an angel to me. Good-by!"

She threw her arms about him and kissed his lips. He heard a stamping on the porch, removed her arms and went down. He felt a high contempt for the men outside; and felt that the slaughter of any number of such beasts would be a praiseworthy deed. He knew that if they but knew of the presence there of that poor, wounded, dying man upstairs, the fate of both would be sealed. If he had known what had just taken place at the front and rear of the house, he would have felt some mitigation of his contempt.

The man with the blood-lust had led a group of crazed followers up to the front door. The man on guard there leveled his gun at them.

"Stand back there," he shouted. "Nobody goes in or out here. Stand back, if you don't want to take a load of buckshot in your guts! The first man that puts his foot on them steps gits it! I mean it! I'll shoot as sure's my name's Bill Blake!"

"Come around back!" said the leader of the lynching faction. "Bill's a fool! The back door's open!"

Owen Gowdy stood at the back door, wondering what had got into the crowd that made them think Fremont McConkey had any connection with the Bushyagers. As well might they suspect him! But he was sure that Raws Upright, who had stationed him there, would control the mob. The root-and-branch faction came cursing around the house.

"We'll git the thief!" their leader shouted. "Let us up here. Hanging fer him!"

"Stop!" said Owen with a leveled gun. "I'll blow the head off the first man that takes a step farther!"

"So we've got traitors with us, have we!" shouted the leader. "Come back, boys! We'll tell the crowd, and we'll git Gowdy an' Bill, too. We'll show you!"

But Fremont knew nothing of this. He reached the front window, still raised, just in time to see the detachment, which had been halted at the back door, rejoin the main body in front.

"I thought you wouldn't get in," said Upright. "Now listen to me! This boy McConkey has got more friends in this county than any man here. He's got more friends than all of us put together. Why? Because he deserves 'em. Why, that boy couldn't do any of the dirty work we've been punishin' here if he tried. He's so honest he's a damn fool, boys. Now I'm honest; but I'm not a fanatic about it."

"That you hain't, Raws!" shouted a voice in the rear, and a laugh broke out in the crowd. Upright liked the sound of the laughter. When a man laughs at that sort of joke, his murderous impulse is past.

"My motto is, 'be honest but not fanatical about it'; but this Freem McConkey is so fur from bein' a hoss-thief, that he'd make me ashamed of myself if I hadn't forgot how to be. Le' me tell you something what he done after Cap Ashe died. The captain had dipped into the county funds

purty free, an' his bondsman was stuck; and Freem McConkey made his shortage good. That boy paid his salary to Jim Boyd, except jest fur a little bread an' potaters, and a few rags to cover him, an' went out of office with a young wife an' two babies, that some skunks I know would make fatherless, an' folks sneered at him—I've heered 'em, by God—because they thought he was too stingy to buy good clothes, when he was poverty-struck by paying for the dead hoss Captain Ashe left on his hands: an' he might have held the respect of the people, if he'd said, 'This hain't my debt. I hain't stole. Let Jim Boyd, that's had the county funds to play with, pay as he agreed to on his bond!' But no, Freem McConkey paid. An' you've seen this pretty little wife of hisn that some would like to make a widder—she an' her sister had a home in Monterey, that the law give 'em free an' clear of debt; an' them two girls an' Freem McConkey give it to the bondsman to make good the captain's shortages. That's what they done. Now, the man that done this is here in this house. The girl that give up her sheer is here, too. Them two little babies is in here. There's a line! Let any son of a black slut that wants to make that girl a widder, and them babies fatherless, step across the line! I want to see the color of his hair! I want to look into his crooked eyes! And then I want to see who's the best man, him or me! Step across, men, if you're men o' that kind! We've killed to-night two better men than the one will be that crosses over. I'm done!"

"I hain't!"

It was Bill Blake's voice from the front door. The root-and-branch faction made no move across the line.

"It's gittin' light in the east, boys," Upright went on. "It's time for night-birds to be huntin' cover. If nobody's goin' to cross the line, I move we go home. I'm told that the sheriff got word of this little party some hours ago, an'

was swearin' in a posse at midnight to purtect the prisoners. Anybody got anything to say ag'in' adjournin'?"

"I've been wantin' to adjourn since half-way through your speech, Raws," said the leader of the root-and-branch faction. "I second the motion!"

"Meetin' stands adjourned!" bellowed Upright.

Fremont stood at the window, his loaded shotgun in hand, listening to Roswell's speech—and forgot that it was he himself whose life was in the balance. He thought of what a lawyer Raws Upright would have made, what a champion of a great cause, if he had only had the training, only the moral fervor. Rienzi's address to the Romans, that supposed Speech of Spartacus to the Gladiators, Mark Antony's oration over the dead body of Cæsar—all these seemed to be equaled, in his mind, by the raw, coarse, almost obscene address of this low politician. What made a great speech? A cause and devotion, fiery devotion to that cause! That was the secret—forgetfulness of self in a subject—and then, as the thought suddenly exploded in his mind, that he, Fremont McConkey was Raws Upright's subject, that he and Cathie and the babies were his cause, he started up, rushed to the door, dropping his weapon, and went out to thank his savior—and the front lawn was as empty of friend and foe as if there had never been so fateful a debate waged there. The meeting, truly, stood adjourned. The mob vanished like a dream; and over the horizon peeped the spreading dawn!

CHAPTER IX

JUST ANOTHER DAY

IT WAS a new day.

Fremont went back to Bent Bushyager's bedside, dazed; with a great feeling of relief in his breast; but trying to recall what he had said to Catherine as he passed down the stairs to meet the mob. Somehow, he did not care any more. It seemed as if everything was coming out right for him.

He was thinking of Raws Upright's speech.

Catherine was bending over Bently's bed, and put up her hand for silence; but in less than a minute little Fernando's morning call made it necessary for her to leave the patient with Fremont.

He was still sleeping; but presently Fremont noted that his eyes were open, and fixed steadily on the watcher by his bed.

"Want something, Bent?" asked Fremont.

"Water!" The voice was so weak that Fremont was startled by it. He gave the water, easing Bent's head back on the pillow as gently as a woman could have done.

"The onliest friend I ever had!" said Bent.

"I wouldn't talk much if I were you, Bent," said Fremont.

Silence for a long time, now. Finally Bent spoke again.

"If you'd 'a' come with us, we could 'a' run the county." And then after a while, "Better not, though. We're done fer!"

The Fewkes girl came; and the sounds of her industry drifted up from below. How strange that the day's work should begin as if nothing had happened! Even the children began their prattling and running about. There was a slight rustling, and Fremont, startled to know that he had dropped asleep in his chair, saw little Lorena standing by the bed and trying to peep over its edge into it. She had in her hand her little First Reader, in which she was convinced she could read. Bently saw the golden head, or heard the patter of her little feet, and said to Fremont, "Lift it up!" Lorena's eyes grew wide as she saw this forbidding figure in her papa's bed, and held out her book as if in propitiation. Bent lifted his hands, took the book, and opened it at the Preface.

"Remember, Freem," he said, "that day they made us set together?"

"Yes," replied Fremont, his eyes filling. "I remember. I'd better take her away now; she'll tire you!"

"Le' me tell her her daddy's way," said Bently, and in his failing voice went on, trying with trembling finger to point to the letters for Lorena, "Peter Rice Eats Fish, Alligators Catches Eels, Eels Catches Alligators, Fish Eats Raw Potaters. That's the way yore daddy showed me, an' that's the right way! Yer daddy's the onliest friend I ever had, little girl!"

Fremont's breath caught, and he felt for a moment as if he would break down, the situation was so pitiful, the memories called up so poignant. The little outcast boy with his outcast sister, facing the strange, and to their natures, the hostile atmosphere of the school, the curious friendship which sprang up between them that day—and now this! . . . Fremont gently took Lorena to the hall and returned, shutting the door. Bently had sunk back as if in a faint, his face paler than ever, his hands clutching at the bedclothes. There was a gurgle in his throat, and Fremont

saw a thin trickle of blood running from the corner of the contorted mouth.

Suddenly Bently raised himself upright in bed, and glared at the door.

"Don't let 'em git me, Freem!"

The terror that had brought him to their door had returned upon him. He threw his feet over the side of the bed, and made as if to rise. Fremont supported him for a moment, felt the burly frame give way in his arms, and gently laid him back on the bed—and as he did so, a fountain of blood burst from his lips, his breath went out in great strangling and choking, and Bently Bushyager had passed away.

Catherine found Fremont with his head on the bed, in one of those paroxysms of weeping which sometimes came upon him. The dreadfulness of Bently's end; the pathos of it, the appeal of his dying reference to their childhood love for each other; the agitations of the night; the relief of the morning—all these culminated in this exhibition of what he felt was weakness. He struggled to control himself, though it seemed as if he should die if he did so. He made a gesture as if of dismissal. Catherine threw her arms about him, and drawing his head down upon her breast she quieted him as if he were a little child—and he yielded to her. He nestled his head down upon that dear bosom, and wept frankly, and more and more quietly.

Why was Cathie doing this? The question must be answered! He raised his face toward hers to put the question to her—in some form, he never knew what; and she laid her warm lips on his in a lingering caress. He put the question now in another form.

"Do you love me, Cathie?"

Her arms drew him closer.

"Darling," said she, "I have loved you always!"

* * * * * *

The things that had to be done were done. Forrest Bushyager, coming into the village to appear for his examination, found no one ready to conduct it; and took away the body of his nephew, at whose funeral Fremont and Catherine McConkey were sincere mourners. They could never feel that Bently was wicked—no matter what they thought—for had not his death given them life?

Among the things that had to be done were the news articles which kept the wires humming and the Calligraph clacking until Fremont wondered at the appetite of the world for horrors. He told the thing as an eye-witness. He wrote special articles on the origin of the Bushyager clan in that marriage of a poor white thief with a cracker girl, and their inability to adjust themselves to the rapid pace of the development of Iowa life—dwellers in woodland shades, mad at the light that shone on the prairies, like insects uncovered when a flat stone is overturned. And between articles, he dwelt in his own new light so unremittingly that little Lorena was for a time lost in wonder that her papa held Aunt Cathie on his lap so much, and never was tired of kissing her; and that Aunt Cathie seemed to like it so well.

But one day, he came with something in his hand, and never kissed Aunt Cathie only just once—he handed her a letter. It was from a Chicago paper, and contained a very high appreciation of his special articles, of his scoop on the Bushyager lynching case, and of his past communications, even though they had been less news in fact than in appearance—("those fakes," said Cathie reproachfully, just to be punished for it). The letter concluded with the suggestion that if he thought he would like newspaper work in Chicago, there was an opening for him on that paper, the exact field and the remuneration to be adjusted in a personal interview.

"What do you think of it?" asked Catherine, very seriously.

"I hope to find that we both think well of it," replied Fremont; "but this isn't all. Read this letter from Dick McGill!"

Mr. McGill's communication informed Fremont what its writer had already told him, that he had expected to offer Fremont a place on the *Journal* before Fremont had made the mistake of loading himself up with that little Jim Crow paper and its two-for-a-nickel plant in a village. Now the time had come when the work of the *Journal* was becoming too onerous for Mr. McGill. Maybe the work in Lithopolis had been a good thing for Fremont, in a way—he would not be an entire greenhorn—anyhow, Mr. McGill would be in Lithopolis in a day or so, or have a representative there, and wanted to take up with Fremont the matter of joining forces with the *Journal;* he hoped during the time before the interview took place and the writing of the letter that Fremont would be thinking over the matter of coming back to a real town, and taking up a man's sized job among his old friends—who were legion.

Fremont looked rather pleased at this concluding remark. It reminded him of Raws Upright's eulogy. It recalled to his mind, too, certain facts as to the behavior of Owen Gowdy at the back, and Bill Blake at the front door, which had come to his knowledge that day. And now Dick McGill admitted that his friends were legion—which was a very McGillish way of putting it.

"Isn't that an odd thing in Mr. McGill's letter," said Catherine, "where he speaks of having a 'representative' call on you? It sounds like some one wanting to sell a press or a supply of paper!"

"That is odd," agreed Fremont, rereading the letter. "Might think he was going to replevy me!"

It was the next day that Fremont looked up from his desk, and saw Paul Holbrook waiting to catch his eye when it left the proofs he was correcting.

"Hello, Paul," said he, and they shook hands in a friendly enough way for two brothers-in-law whose wives carried the affection between the families in their own names. "Is May with you?"

"No," replied Paul. "I came on business. Weren't you expecting me?"

"N—n—o," said Fremont, "can't say I was. Always glad though. Better excuse me while I run over and tell Cathie that we'll have a guest at table?"

"Send some one," suggested Paul. "I thought Dick McGill wrote you that I was likely to call on you."

"If you are his 'representative,' he did," answered Fremont. "What's up? Is Dick suing me?"

"It's about your coming to work on the *Journal*," said Paul.

"He said nothing about work," replied Fremont. "He said 'join forces.' Not always the same thing, you know, Paul."

"Well, anyhow, Freem, I am here to explain the situation. The fact is, Dick is like the Bushyagers in your *Tribune* story—he has been overtaken by civilization. Great as he was as editor of a little weekly, in which he knew every one he wrote of, and could comment on Magnus Thorkelson's red hair and Mrs. Absalom Frost's belief in signs, he is lost on even as big a paper as the *Journal*. He's been running behind financially, and the paper isn't as good as it should be. We—that is, my father—has had to take over the control; and he's given it to me on such terms as will make it possible for me to pay for it. He thinks, and I agree with him, that I had better stick to the law, and get some one in with an interest, to run the paper. We think—and he was the one to suggest it—that you, with your wide acquaintance and your many friends, and the talent you've shown in the field of journalism, are the man for us to get in with us, if we can. You'll want an interest, of course. And

we'll have to take this Lithopolis property off your hands. It can go toward the purchase of your interest in the *Journal*. The rest can be arranged so your dividends will pay for the stock when there are any; and we'll give you a living salary. Your title would be editor; but you'd be a man of all work until the thing got big enough to make subdivision possible, with a reporter or two, and a good man on the mechanical side. Dick said you'd be thinking it over. Have you?"

"I've been offered a place on a Chicago paper," said Fremont. "Cathie and I have been talking over both situations; but, of course, your statement puts it in a somewhat different light. What becomes of Dick McGill in your plan?"

"He retains an interest, and looks after the blank-book, legal blank and job departments. He's anxious to have you come, you know. I wonder if the Chicago paper would be likely to give you as satisfactory a place as ours. I want you to do what's best for you; but, personally, I'm anxious to have you come."

"How about my former identification with the patriots you are after in the courts?"

"I'll take chances on that," said Paul, smiling.

"How about control of policy?" asked Fremont.

"Well, I've had quite an argument with father about that," said Paul. "He thinks you're pretty radical, and suspects that I am; and his philosophy is that the money ought to control; but I've convinced him that integrity of spirit on the part of the editor is the thing which finally must be best, not only for the community, but for the paper itself. He's yielded on that, and put the whole matter of my interest in my hands. You as editor would control policy."

"I'll talk it over with Cathie," said Fremont at last; "but I think we'll go to Chicago. But while we're talking, Paul,

I want to say that I think it's mighty generous of you, and quite inexplicable, to make this offer. And I want to say that one of my reasons for coming over here to Lithopolis was my desire to get out of a town where I had been a part of such a corrupt ring, and didn't have the sense to know it!"

"You made that clear to everybody," said Paul. "Everybody understands that, Fremont."

"I want you to understand," went on Fremont, "that I think you were right and that I was wrong all the time, and I want to apologize for everything spiteful and foolish I did!"

"I don't remember anything spiteful," replied Paul, offering his hand, "and as for foolishness, I have a selfish interest in not having that made a capital offense. It's all forgotten, Fremont!"

And so, here I am, I, Fremont McConkey, the writer of this history, a middle-aged man, and the editor of the *Monterey Journal,* with a family of boys and girls growing up about me, and about as much property as Raws Upright told the Boston gentlemen he had, "a good house, and a qualifiedly good barn," and a wife who grows younger and fresher as my own hair departs—and who has furnished that balance for me which I think I should have lacked without her. I can not speak of more intimate things.

I bring this history to a close at the end of the era of the county irregularities, and of the career of the Bushyagers, because it marks a dividing point in our history. I think that the mob succeeded in its object of wiping out the bandits; for they never appeared again, and the community has since then been no more characterized by lawlessness than any other quiet midwest county. I feel sure, however, that the terrible act of violence by which it was accomplished subtracted more from the moral height of our

people than the extirpation of a far worse band than the Bushyagers could have added to it. There is always a moral loss in mob violence. The period of county boodling was terminated by Paul Holbrook's prosecutions; and we are now no more corrupt than is inevitable under the American form of county government—chiefly the corruption of inefficiency. With these two things, and what they stood for, the early development of this Iowa community ended—so far as anything in history ends. The same or similar phase of progress was passed through all over the Midwest.

I suppose that the discerning reader—and I write for no other—long since suspected that the "he" in this book has really meant "I." Fremont McConkey in writing it preferred to deal with himself in the third person. I am looked upon as having made a great success in life. I am consulted on city, state and county matters. The *Journal,* with the growth of the city, has grown in a gratifying manner. My importance, working as I have been doing with that grand fellow, Paul Holbrook, has waxed year by year. There is an "I-Knew-Him-When-Club" which is composed of people who knew me when I herded cattle on the prairie out north of the Finster place.

But what of the dreams? What of the poems which I was to write? What of the Island of Palms where I was to make immortal things?

Perhaps we had better not talk of that. Iowa has been a wonderful place for certain people. Uncle Jake Vandemark is the classic illustration. People tell how he drove into the county, a green Dutch canal hand, and now look at him! With seven hundred acres of Nile mud from the drainage of Vandemark's Folly Slew. But Iowa has not always smiled on her dreamers, her poets, her children with the divine fire in their souls, whether much or little of it. I am just a newspaper man! And yet, I know that if the artist born in Iowa could only be allowed such a life of the

soul as would impel him to respect his Iowa materials, and to ponder them long enough and deeply enough, every element of great art would be found here.

I have just tried (unavailingly) to conceal that last page from Cathie, who is reading them as they come from my pen—or rather, my typewriter. Unavailingly—for she is asking the reader's attention to a few lines which she will dictate:

"He is all wrong about having failed as a writer! He has just begun. He has been growing in power all the time. He offers this book which you are now reading, as the first fruits of his powers. He calls it 'The History of Monterey County,' but I think a better name for it would be *'The Education of Fremont McConkey.'* "

THE END

REVIEWS AND COMMENTS

VANDEMARK'S FOLLY

BY HERBERT QUICK

Author of The Hawkeye

Reviews and Comments

VANDEMARK'S FOLLY

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Author of The Hawkeye

William Lyon Phelps, in *The New York Times:*

Here is a novel we have all been waiting for. It is of the Americans, for the Americans, and by an American. It is a story of the Erie Canal and the Iowa farms—a story filled with exciting adventure and presented with consummate skill. It glows with vitality. It has in it the spirit of life. I wish that *Vandemark's Folly* might circulate in England, and be translated into all the European languages. Here is the truth. Mr. Quick has caught a rapidly changing phase of American civilization and has made an imperishable record of it. Every chapter is full of abounding tumultuous American life; full of real men and real women, who worked, and worshiped, and loved, and hated, and sinned.

Syracuse Post-Standard:

The best novel of the year has been written by an American, about Americans, in the American language.

Richard A. Rice, Professor of English Literature at Smith College:

The subject is the central matter in American life, and Mr. Quick, in a style laden with the poetical slang of the pioneers, gives it the color, whimsicality, energy and roughness typical of American progress. It is a vivid historical pageant and a good romantic yarn which will appeal to a variety of palates.

George Herbert Betts, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois:

Vandemark's Folly gripped me strongly as I read it from introduction to final page. It will grip any one who loves honest adventure, the call of the frontiers, the sweep of broad prairies and the warmth of tried comradeship. It is a significant contribution not only to the literature, but likewise to the history of our great inland empire.

Hendrik Willem Van Loon, in *The Baltimore Sun*:

Not since Abraham described his adventures on the trip from Ur to Canaan have I enjoyed anything as much as this humble record of an unknown pioneer.

Marion Harland:

It seems to me to be a wonderful picture of a phase of American life which will take on more and more a tinge of the mythical as time goes by. It is fiction, it is romance, and it is history. It also is biography of the best kind. There is not a dull page in the book. I might truthfully add not a commonplace character nor situation.

Harry Hansen, in *Chicago Daily News:*

A great historical novel—one of the best in many years.

Hon. J. B. Weaver, Attorney-at-Law, Des Moines:

Every page of *Vandemark's Folly* carries a wondrous scent of the prairie, and in the dramatic crises you feel again and more deeply than before the amazing variety, the comedy, the pathos, the tragedy, the exaltation that are woven into the framework of our great prairie states.

Detroit Saturday Night:

Vandemark's Folly classifies as an exceptionally real and veracious tale of the pioneer days—easily one of the best things the fiction field has offered of late.

***The Outlook*:**

It is an American *Ivanhoe*. Here at last is the epic of the Middle West, embodying both the romantic glamour and the bitter realities that attended men's conquest of the soil. It is a book of terrific climaxes without distortion of historical accuracy. It is written with singular understanding of the heart of America and the battling of its pioneers.

Stuart P. Sherman, University of Illinois:

Vandemark is a real addition to our gallery of representative Americans in fiction.

William Allen White:

The best historical novel of middle America I ever read.

***Los Angeles Times*:**

A novel that stands out as one of the most remarkable pieces of work appearing in recent years.

Arthur Holmes, President Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa:

Every now and then a work of fiction appears which is so markedly superior to the mass of literature in that field that it immediately stands out as something more than a novel. *Vandemark's Folly* is one of these books. I read it at one sitting without ever closing the book from the first page to the last.

Ellery Rand, in *The Baltimore Sun*:

Our hands go out to Mr. Quick. There is real art in his book. He strikes a note and maintains it. He creates a character and keeps it true to itself.

Ernest Poole:

It strikes me as one of the biggest things of its kind that have been done in this country in years.

Donald Adams in *The Baltimore American:*

Not since *A Son of the Middle Border* have we read a book which makes such rich use of American pioneer history as Herbert Quick's new novel, *Vandemark's Folly.*

Octave Thanet:

I don't wonder the women took to "Cow" Vandemark. He is one real man.

Christian Science Monitor:

All the glamour of the old West, the reeling miles of golden prairie land, level from horizon to horizon's edge, empty save for swift passing cloud shadows; the rattle and stir of life on the old Ridge Road, ox-carts and prairie schooners dipping into mid-distance, the ever-swelling current of emigration, the Middle West as it was and never again will be, are clear and compelling background for *Vandemark's Folly.*

Hardin Craig, Professor of English Literature, State University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa:

Vandemark's Folly is a most interesting work, and if people know what they are about, all over the country it will achieve an enormous popularity. The blizzard and the prairie fire are immense, and all through there is such consistent realism or verisimilitude that even an old novel-reader like me is quite unable to believe that it is not a flesh-of-the-flesh and bone-of-the-bone human experience.

John Clair Minot in *The Boston Herald:*

Vandemark's Folly is a truly great historical novel.

Emerson Hough, in *The Step Ladder:*

It is universal as are all great books. A good book, brothers.

Bliss Perry, Professor of English Literature, Harvard University:

I read *Vandemark's Folly* with delight. It is genuine native stuff. I don't know who first invented the phrase "racy of the soil," but this story deserves it; and the book gives not only a sense of the soil, but of great open spaces and the sky. That stubborn Dutchman is to me a new type with a congenial vocabulary.

Los Angeles Examiner:

It is an epic of the conquest of the soil, and gives a good picture of the hardships and adventures of the pioneer type of man. The beauty of it is, however, that it is clean, strong and cheerful. All the way through we get not only the idea of struggle, but the idea of a human soul triumphant over struggle. It is interesting. It is real. And best of all, it is all that is implied in the word "wholesome."

Raymond MacDonald Alden, Professor of English Literature, Leland Stanford, Jr., University:

I have found *Vandemark's Folly* captivating. The history of the prairie settlement is made more human than in anything I remember to have read; on this account I am calling the book to the attention of my colleagues in history, thinking they will wish to recommend it to their students. But I, of course, am more interested in the really fine interpretation of the boy hero. It is the only recent story on sex problems which I have wanted my own boy to read.

Walter Pritchard Eaton, in *Judge:*

A story of the settlement of Iowa. It closes in 1859. But the story of the pioneer Middle Westerner never has been more accurately and dramatically told. It is more than a novel. It is an epic of our pioneer life in the western Mississippi Valley.

Richard Burton, University of Minnesota:

Vandemark's Folly is mighty fine, really splendid as chronicle history. As a student of language these many years, of the adaptation of style to material and purpose, I take my hat off to the homely veracity Quick has accomplished here. It is a feat, verily. It recalls Defoe in his *History of the Great Plague,* or Franklin in his *Autobiography.* And it is richly worth while as an epic of our pioneer period. All our school children ought to be made to read it; only they'd want to. . . . My soul, but I am glad *Vandemark's Folly* got itself done.

Literary Digest:

There ought to be more books like this of Mr. Quick's, with its true epic quality, its great song of the making of our country. Here is a story that no lover of America can afford to miss, for it is filled with that wonderful spirit that has made America.

C. Alphonso Smith, Professor of English Literature, United States Naval Academy:

It is a big thing well done. What I like especially about it is that the human touch isn't lost in mere geographical and environmental detail; human beings are first, these things secondary but finely complementary.

New York Herald:

An epic romance of the American spirit, and of that time when America swept like a great tide across the prairies to the Rocky Mountains.

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle:

There are passages in the book that remind one of Balzac.

Henry Canby, in The Literary Review of *New York Evening Post*:

A pioneer story, the history of an Iowa township, crammed full of valuable historical fact. The hero is John Ridd of *Lorna Doone* become a Dutchman fighting for his neighborhood, building it up, winning estate and love and beauty, while he remains the same slow and honest thinker.

W. A. Neilson, President of Smith College:

An extremely vivid picture of an interesting phase in the development of the Middle West. Its historical value is great and there is an abundance of excellent characterization.

Dr. Albert Shaw, in *The Review of Reviews*:

The tale itself is romantic and delightful; but the book has extraordinary value apart from the dramatic interest of characters and plot (which will doubtless make a great success in the movies), because of its flawless pictures of nature, and of the life of the period with which it deals.

H. W. Boynton, in *The Independent*:

It may well take its place among the handful of American classics in its kind.

***St. Louis Globe-Democrat*:**

Vandemark's Folly has all the fire and romance, the fervor of love and hate, the depth of passion, of early days on the great prairies. It is as wholesome and invigorating as the winds that blew over the beautiful Iowa prairies.

Fanny Butcher, in *Chicago Tribune*:

Let's make it unanimous.